CARR, NORA K., Ed.D. Investigating the North Carolina Charter School Movement: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Editorial-page Items from 1995 to 2014. (2015)
Directed by Dr. Carl Lashley. 202 pp.

Charter schools remain hotly contested nationally and in North Carolina, where the number of charter schools has grown rapidly from 100 in 2011 to 148 in 2014. Interest shows no signs of abating. North Carolina has approved 11 new charter schools to open in 2015, along with two new virtual charter schools. The state has received 40 applications from charter operators hoping to open new schools in 2016.

This dissertation conducts a critical discourse analysis of 114 randomly selected editorial-page items and 60 news articles about charter schools published by 20 North Carolina newspapers from 1995 to 2014. The findings indicate that the strategic use of political discourse, consistent message framing, and editorial board support helped charter school proponents gain more social, economic, and cultural power in North Carolina, despite charter schools' tendency toward hyper-segregation by race and class, limited gains in student achievement, and lingering doubts regarding equity of access, scalability, oversight, and public accountability.

Key words: critical discourse analysis (CDA), frames, editorial(s), news, charter schools, race, class, equity, North Carolina, school reform, public policy.

INVESTIGATING THE NORTH CAROLINA CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT:

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL-PAGE

ITEMS FROM 1995 to 2014

by

Nora K. Carr

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2015

Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

I am blind, yet I see. I am deaf, yet I hear. —Helen Keller

I dedicate this work to all those who fight to keep the flame of liberty and learning alight for all students in our public schools.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Nora K. Carr, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. —Lao Tzu

When I embarked on this educational journey, I wanted to stretch my mind and increase my knowledge of public education, specifically what worked, and what didn't, and why, or why not. A lateral entry educational leader, I wanted to improve my professional practice and strengthen my contributions to my school district, which thanks to generous donations from our business community, was helping to pay for this amazing opportunity. I also relished the opportunity to more deeply explore the intersection of school and district communications, public opinion, and public policy on public education. Having attended public and parochial schools, and having worked in urban education for most of my professional life, I was curious about charter schools, having little personal or professional experience with this growing phenomenon. I lived in Missouri during the first half of my professional career, which did not have charter schools, and only arrived in North Carolina after being recruited for an assistant superintendent position in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1999. Having the opportunity to explore this movement more deeply has been interesting, challenging, and eye-opening. I would also like to acknowledge that much of the material in the historical overview and literature review was originally published in an article titled "An Epistemic Frame Analysis of Neoliberal Culture and Politics in the US, UK, and the UAE" (Mullen, Samier, Brindley, English, & Carr, 2013), and is used with the permission of Springer Science+Media.

What I didn't anticipate, and have most deeply appreciated, was the collegiality and camaraderie I found in our doctoral cohort and in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations community at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. While I questioned

my sanity in tackling this academic quest more than once during the past five years, I will always cherish the readings, discussions, assignments, probing questions, and gentle prodding that characterized this experience. I also am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee, and to those who challenged my thinking and helped me gain a deeper understanding of race and racism in public schooling and U.S. society, the horror and pervasive evil of slavery and Jim Crow, and the related realities of white privilege. I am forever in your debt. My only regret is that I lived my life for more than 50 years and was able to earn two degrees with only surface and fleeting knowledge of how our shared histories continue to shape our present circumstances. What is known can't be unknown, however. I look forward to seeing where this path leads next.

This work is dedicated to those who have helped me see the world differently, and more expansively, opening my eyes and ears to the giftedness of so many individuals and scholars whom I would not have met, or otherwise encountered. My life's journey is richer for your willingness to share your stories and your wisdom with me, and for encouraging my learning. I also dedicate this work to my family, who have patiently carried on without me while I indulged my intellect and energies in this pursuit, and to my mother and father, who instilled in me an unquenchable thirst for learning, and a deep regard for the learned. Lastly, I dedicate this work to the public schools, and the educators and other unsung heroes who have made this nation great by transforming lives and communities, one child at a time, and to our students, and families, who remind us daily of the promise and fragility of human life and dignity.

With a nod to the Jesuit educational tradition, which I was blessed to experience: May we always strive to form men and women for others.

PREFACE

> Whereof what's past is prologue, what come [in] yours and my discharge. (Shakespeare, 1564-1616)

Language matters. We use talk, text, and symbols to represent and shape our world, bring order out of chaos, and structure to our experiences. In turn, we are shaped by the words we use, and the processes and tools we use to express ourselves and communicate our thoughts to others. Language is at intensely personal, yet strangely collective. As social beings, we want to share and connect with others as we build our worlds, yet we also seek time alone to reflect on what we have wrought. The exquisite use of language is an art that can make our souls soar to the heavens, only to bring us crashing to the deepest darkness later. Language can inspire us to greatness, and it can speak to our deepest fears of unworthiness. Rhetoric has given birth to democracy, social justice movements, and universal education at public expensive. The skillful and manipulative use of language also has readied the killing fields of slavery, the annihilation of native peoples, Jim Crow segregation, the Holocaust, apartheid, and modern-day genocide. It has sold us on cigarettes, alcohol, legal drugs, and war.

Artful marketing and skillful rhetorical packaging by a relatively small group of wealthy individuals and their foundations continues to sell parents, policy makers, and the public on charter schools and other alternatives to public education. Whether the triumph of the charter school movement is good for public education, a detriment, or somewhere in between remains to be seen, but some early indications are troubling. As a new social reality of public education is constructed, I hope and pray it is one that builds on past progress, and does not require yet

another civil and disability rights movement to undue damage done by the stubborn refusal to ignore data and research that does not align with policy makers' preferred ideological positions.

Having spent most of my adult life toiling in the service of creating more inclusive schools and communities for people with disabilities, it is painful to witness the systemic dismantling of such hard-won progress. As of this writing, I am not aware of a single charter, or private school in North Carolina, for example, that would serve my daughter and sister with intellectual disabilities, both of whom also are dually diagnosed with mental illness and, at times, with behavioral disorders. My parents had to fight to get any form of education for my sister, and were advised instead to institutionalize her; my daughter, who is one of only about 250 individuals worldwide known to have her rare chromosomal disorder (9p-), has been the fortunate beneficiary of activism by individuals with disabilities, parents of disabled children, and special educators.

The landmark 1975 Education for Handicapped Children (PL: 94-142) came too late for my sister, but established my daughter's right to a free and appropriate education, while the inclusive education movement and passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 affirmed her civil rights in this country and in our schools and communities. She now works as a volunteer teacher assistant with young children with significant and profound disabilities, and enjoys a better social life than her parents. Such progress would not have been possible without the civil rights movement and the foundational belief that ". . . in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Warren, 1954). I am left to wonder whether the powerful and life-affirming inclusive educational experiences my daughter enjoyed as a student at East Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte will remain for future generations of students with disabilities, especially as I have yet

to find a single charter, private, or parochial school in North Carolina that would enroll and serve a child with similar gifts and challenges. I hate to think that greater choice for some will restrict choice and school quality for the children and young people who face the greatest learning challenges.

I also stand proudly today on the shoulders of my great-grandmothers, who left everything they knew and loved behind in order to travel to the New World, and then across their new country, in order to educate their children, particularly their daughters. With this legacy, I cannot rest as the specters of exclusion, discrimination, and oppression continue to haunt and constrain children's futures. Thus, while I find the current times disheartening, and more oftentimes identify with the mad Don Quixote than with Marian Wright Edelman, Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, Harriet Tubman, and my other longtime "she-roes," who seem to have accomplished so much lasting change despite the overwhelming obstacles they encountered, I will fight on. With Robert Frost, ". . . I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep."

This dissertation investigates how the strategic use of political discourse during nearly two decades helped achieve a major public policy shift in K–12 schooling in North Carolina, one that moved charter schools from a limited experiment to widespread acceptance as a permanent fixture in the public education landscape. In keeping with the tenets of critical discourse analysis, this dissertation embeds the texts studied in the broader historical and cultural contexts surrounding them, thus bringing to the forefront important power relationships and ideologies for analysis and interrogation. More specifically, this study analyzes 114 editorial-page items and 60 news stories about charter schools published from 1995 to 2014 by 20 North Carolina newspapers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the South goes, so goes the nation. W.E.B. Du Bois (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 18)

When the North Carolina General Assembly (NGCA) authorized the creation of charter schools in 1996 with bipartisan support, state legislators outlined several core purposes for the new system, which would operate independently of existing public schools. These purposes included: improving student learning, expanding learning experiences, "encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods, creating new professional opportunities for teachers," "providing parents and students with expanded choices," and changing from "rule-based to performance-based accountability systems" (Mullen, Samier, Brindley, English, & Carr, 2013; North Carolina General Assembly, 1996, c. 731, s. 2).

Proposed by Republicans, the legislation put North Carolina on the vanguard of the nation's charter school movement. A majority of both houses endorsed charter schools as incubators of innovation that would inform and improve the practice of traditional public schools (Mullen et al., 2013; NCGA, 1996, c. 731, s. 2.) Given the unproven nature of charter schools as an effective model of public education, or perhaps to alleviate fears that charters would drain limited financial resources from traditional public schools, the NCGA also placed a 100-school cap on the number of new charters that could be authorized by the State Board of Education (Mullen et al., 2013).

Nearly two decades later, when the NCGA approved lifting the cap constraining charter school expansion, data showing that the state's charter-school experiment had failed to meet the goals outlined in the enabling legislation was deemed premature and insignificant (Berendsen,

2008, 2008a; Boyum, 2009; Hood, 2000, 2004; Kakadelis, 2005). Given more time, more favorable financing, and more legislative freedom, the promised results would materialize, proponents insisted (Hood, 2000, 2004; Kakadelis, 2005). With an absence of research demonstrating improvement in student achievement and with most North Carolina charter schools resembling traditional public schools rather than the promised hothouses of innovation, parental choice had moved from one of several rationales identified for charter school creation in the mid-1990s to the primary rallying cry for their expansion (Burrows, 2011; Guignard, 2013; Mullen et al., 2013; NAPC, 2014). Demonstrating the charter school movement's growing political clout, the push to lift North Carolina's charter school cap in 2011 occurred on both sides of the political aisle, including Democratic Governor Beverly Perdue on one side, and the Republican-controlled NCGA on the other (Mullen et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Robelen, 2009).

This historic policy shift occurred with little fanfare, organized opposition, or media scrutiny (Mullen et al., 2013). Even longtime charter school opponents such as the North Carolina School Boards Association (NSBA) refused to enter the fray, recognizing that the new Republican majority already had the votes required to approve the measure (Mullen et al., 2013; NCSBA, 2011). At the same time, Democrats who had previously opposed charter school expansion were eager to remove the cap in the wake of North Carolina's failure to win coveted economic stimulus funding, which appeared tied to lifting charter school caps in practice if not in stated policy (Mullen et al., 2013; McNeil, 2009). Distracted by budget cuts and a host of legislative attacks on multiple fronts, the traditional public school coalition of parents, educators, and school board members was spread so thinly across so many issues it failed to mount much of a protest (Ellinwood, 2011; Fitzsimon, 2012a, 2012b; Mullen et al., 2013).

Soon it became clear that the Great Recession and legitimate concerns regarding persistent gaps in student performance achieved what decades of white resistance to

desegregation and the civil rights movement could not: a dual system for public education (Bischoff, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Mullen et al., 2013; Reardon and Bischoff, 2011). With the economic meltdown providing political cover, a flurry of legislative activity and budget maneuvering had once again legalized and supported a fragmented public school system in North Carolina (Bilfulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2009, 2009a; Bilfulco & Ladd, 2006a, 2007; Bischoff, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Mullen et al., 2013; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). As part of this dual system, one branch would be comprised of heavily regulated and closely monitored traditional public school districts governed by voter-elected boards of education, and one would be comprised of autonomous, independently run schools with private governing boards and little or no state oversight (Mullen et al., 2013).

By expanding public charter school options and approving tax-credit tuition vouchers for special education in 2011, followed by the approval of voucher legislation in 2012, the NCGA signaled the end of an era (Mullen et al., 2013). The legislative attack on the "general and uniform system of free public schools . . . wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students" (NC Constitution, Article IX, 2012) in favor of a market-driven system had begun (Fitzsimon, 2012a, 2012b; Mullen et al., 2013; Ravitch, 2014, 2014a, 2014b). Ignoring the lingering impact of more than 350 years of race-based oppression, as well as contemporary cultural conflicts, public policy now requires schools to compete with each other for students, teachers, engaged parents, and other resources (Mullen et al., 2013). It remains unknown whether this new approach heralds the liberation of learning from the status quo (Moe & Chubb, 2009), or will only exacerbate the opportunity and achievement gaps that already exist in K-12 education (Mullen et al., 2013). Early indications are troubling, however (Mullen et al., 2013).

The resegregation of traditional public schools and school systems set in motion by a string of Superior and Supreme Court decisions in Southern states in the post-desegregation era

only intensifies in many charter schools, some of which appear to encourage and subsidize white and socioeconomic flight from more diverse public schools (Buras, 2011; Irons, 2002; Mullen et al., 2013; Orfield, 2001; Orfield, as cited in Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Urrieta, 2006; Ni, 2012). Publicly available school and district data published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, for example, indicate that charter schools serve fewer students who are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, disabled, or who qualify for English as a Second Language services (Bilfulco et al., 2009, 2009a; Bilfulco & Ladd, 2006a, 2007; Mullen et al., 2013; NCDPI, 2015). Superintendents in North Carolina's 10 largest school districts report growing concerns regarding increased student segregation by race, poverty, and disability, as well as white and socioeconomic flight from traditional public schools.

Financial abuse by a small number of charter operators, widening economic disparities, and the negative impact of charter schools on traditional public school students and budgets appear to validate earlier concerns about this unproven school reform strategy (Ash, 2014; Bilfulco et al., 2009, 2009a; Biflulco & Ladd, 2006a, 2007; Cho, Chudnofsky, Jiang, & Landes, 2013; Clotfeler, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2002, 2013; Ellinwood, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Watson, 2014). As in other states, urban school districts in North Carolina with higher concentrations of poverty and more diverse student bodies are particularly hard-hit by unfettered charter school growth (Ash, 2014; Bilfulco et al., 2009, 2009a; Biflulco & Ladd, 2006a, 2007; Cho et al., 2013; Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Ellinwood, 2011; Ladd, 2012).

While charter schools are expanding statewide, most are concentrated in metropolitan areas that feature county-wide school districts with healthy local tax bases that supplement state funding (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; NCDPI, 2014). Interestingly, these urban areas also tend to offer the broadest array of public, private, and parochial school choices (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; NCDPI, 2014). In some North Carolina counties, charter school growth is primarily

occurring in affluent suburban neighborhoods and communities, many of which already boast of some of the highest-achieving public schools in the state (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; NCDPI, 2010a, 2010b). Since the cap was lifted, the number of charter schools in North Carolina has grown rapidly, up from 100 in 2012 to 148 in 2014 (Clotfelter et al., 2013; NCDPI, 2015).

Interest remains high, as evidenced by the 71 applications the state received in August of 2015; the state approved 11, after receiving criticism that it was approving too many schools too quickly (Ash, 2014; NCDPI, 2015). Charter school interest in North Carolina shows no signs of abating. The state has received 40 applications from charter operators hoping to open new schools in 2016, and recently authorized the establishment of two virtual K-12 charter schools (NCDPI, 2015). (See also Appendix E, Percentage of Public School Students in Membership at Charter Schools, 2011-12 and 2012-13.)

As increasing numbers of charter school operators target more affluent suburban neighborhoods and bedroom communities for growth, the potential for further disenfranchisement of poor, minority, immigrant, and disabled students only deepens (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013). Despite these well-documented concerns, North Carolina is on a fast track to a new educational reality, one in which private sector prerogatives are rapidly becoming the norm. As Tyack (2003) noted,

> Although Adlai Stevenson believed that public education was 'the most American thing about America,' many people do not share that view today. Some speak of "government schools" as if they were alien invaders of their communities instead of longstanding neighborhood institutions. At the turn of the twenty-first century, people talk about the cash value of schooling or the latest innovation, but rarely speak about the powerful ideas that link public schooling to our political past and future. (p. 181)

Within this rapidly changing environment, this dissertation investigates how the strategic use of political discourse during a 20-year period helped achieve a major public opinion and policy shift in K-12 schooling in North Carolina, one that moved charter schools from a limited

experiment to widespread acceptance as a permanent fixture in the public education landscape. In keeping with the tenets of critical discourse analysis, this dissertation embeds the texts studied in the broader historical and cultural contexts surrounding them, thus surfacing important power relationships and ideologies for analysis and interrogation. More specifically, this study analyzes texts about charter schools published on the editorial pages of 20 North Carolina newspapers.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions were used and are referenced throughout this dissertation.

Charter management organization (CMO). For profit and not-for-profit entities hired by charter school boards to operate their schools. Contractual services vary from board development and student recruitment and marketing to personnel, purchasing, finance, accounting, facilities, curriculum and instruction, parent engagement assistance, and professional development, among others.

Charter school. Schools that receive public funding but are operated by private boards of directors and are freed from many of the rules and regulations that govern public schools. Charter schools may or may not be open to all students, depending on application and selection criteria.

Charter-school laws. Laws that authorize and regulate charter schools in individual states. Such laws vary widely. In North Carolina, charter schools may be authorized only by the State Board of Education, after receiving recommendations from the Charter School Advisory Board. Non-profit organizations, faith communities, and public/private institutes of higher education may submit charter applications; local education agencies (school districts) may not. Monitoring is minimal, partly by design, and partly by chronic underfunding and staffing of the state's charter school office.

Charter-school cap. A legal limit placed on the number of charter schools that may be authorized to operate and receive public tax dollars within a particular political jurisdiction. Such limits may be placed on the number of charter schools by city, county, school district, or state.

Choice. Choice is defined broadly to include magnet and option schools, charter schools, tuition tax credits, private school tuition vouchers, special education vouchers and tax credits, homeschool vouchers for instructional materials, and other public policies designed to give parents more school options funded with taxpayer dollars.

Colorblind racism. A more covert form of racism in which the majority denies the existence of racism in post-modern society while at the same indicating that persistent gaps in achievement and disproportionate outcomes in almost every aspect of American life are the result of individual failure rather than the collective impact of racist structures and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006).

Framing, or frame. Framing refers to the way certain words, phrases, and ideas are used to package, condense, and simplify news and information for public consumption. Frames act as rhetorical shorthand by providing a quick synopsis of key ideas in the same way that a picture frame contains and focuses a photograph, or piece of art. By placing some information and ideas in the foreground and overshadowing others, framing can also serve as a form of persuasion, particularly in political discourse (Borah, 2011; Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Matthes, 2009; McQuail, 1994, 2010; Scheufele, 2000; Wenden, 2005).

Implicit bias. Bias and bigotry based on individual or group differences that are so automatic and unconscious as to have become normalized, and therefore invisible to the majority. In this manner, bias and bigotry are implied, rather than explicitly stated (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000).

Jim Crow. Refers to the violent, legal, and systemic oppression of African-Americans in Southern states post-Reconstruction in an apartheid-like system that circumscribed every detail of African-American lives as members of an inferior caste without recourse. The origin of the term is unclear and may have referred to a popular white minstrel character who wore blackface while impersonating a disabled black man as a form of entertainment (Wilkerson, 2010).

Neoconservativism/neoliberalism. The joining of the right and left in pursuing public policies based on belief unsupported by evidence that unfettered capitalism, the unrestrained pursuit of wealth, and the unseen and unbiased hand of the market represent the most efficient, fairest, and democratic means of organizing society (Apple, 2001, 2006; Boldeman, 2007; Bourdieu, 1999, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Mullen et al., 2013).

Political actor. A sociological term that refers to an elected official, government official, or other individual active in politics, including public policy formation.

Prejudice. Within the critical race theory framework, prejudice refers to discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and actions on the part of individuals in a society (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Bonilla-Silver & Forman, 2000).

Privatization. The contracting of public services, such as public education, to the private sector in an effort to maximize efficiencies and lower costs associated with government services. Privatization also may include the formation of public-private partnerships. Critics of privatization maintain that such efforts are designed to limit access and lower quality while increasing profits for private enterprises (Apple, 2001, 2006; Mullen et al., 2013).

Public school. Full service schools that are funded by tax dollars, open to all students, and are governed by locally elected school boards, or school boards that are appointed by other locally elected officials, such as mayors. Services include special education, English as a Second Language, transportation, and child nutrition, among others. Does not include schools with

selective application and selection criteria, such as some magnet schools, and option schools where transportation may/may not be provided.

Racism. Systemic, collective, and oppressive structures that maintain power for one group while oppressing another. Within this framework, individuals are privileged and possibly prejudiced, not racist. Individuals of minority groups cannot be racist; however, they can be prejudiced (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006).

Resegregation. The transition from schools that were formerly integrated to schools where students of one race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other traits are less likely to encounter students of a different race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Segregation. Within schools and classrooms, a situation in which students of one race, ethnicity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other trait(s), are less likely to encounter students who are of a different race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other trait(s).

Social actor. A sociological term that refers to individuals within a certain group, or society who takes an active role in shaping that group, or society.

Stakeholder. An individual who has (holds) a personal investment in, or may be personally affected by, a particular public policy, or issue.

Structural racism. Social structures, practices, policies, and laws that appear race neutral on the surface, but actually favor the group/group members in power at the expense of oppressed individuals/groups. In schools, this may include student disciplinary codes, school and teacher assignment policies, screening systems for academically gifted programs, advanced-level courses, and special education services, among others (Bonilla Silva, 2009).

Vision of Dissertation

This first chapter introduces the basic rationale and concepts that undergird this study, which investigates during a 20-year period the strategic use of political discourse in the evolution of public policies favorable to charter schools in North Carolina.

The second chapter provides a review of the broader historical and cultural contexts and complex social phenomena influencing the discourses that serve as the locus of this study, as well as a review of the literature regarding charter school efficacy. Social justice issues of inclusivity and equity in relation to charter and traditional public schools are also explored.

The third chapter introduces the reader to the research questions that form the basis of this study, which seeks to gain a greater understanding of how charter schools have gained more social, economic, and cultural power in North Carolina. This chapter also provides an overview of critical discourse analysis and explains how this research method is ideally suited to studying the growing charter school movement, which is a complex, social phenomenon with significant social-justice implications. Details also are provided regarding the rationale and process used to select the texts for analysis, as well as the tools used to capture and interpret the data.

The study findings are outlined in the fourth chapter, which identifies the major frames used in the political discourses analyzed. The findings also bring the social actors, power relationships, and ideologies embedded in the texts to the forefront for analysis and discussion.

The final chapter connects the findings to the broader historical and cultural contexts outlined in Chapter II. This chapter provides additional insight into how the strategic use of political discourse helped the charter school movement win favorable public policies and secure a permanent and growing foothold in the public education landscape. Implications for the professional practice of educational leaders and future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> When you have no schoolhouse, and when you have no teacher, why call it a school system? . . . We live in a land of one-room cabins, mere crop-mortgaged peasants. (Harlan, 1958, p. 4)

Historical and Cultural Conflicts Continue to Shape the South

To understand the contemporary cultural conflicts in public education in the South requires a deeper understanding of the region's unique history as an importer of European aristocratic traditions and white supremacy as well as its "peculiar institution" of chattel slavery. If, as Shakespeare notes, "what's past is prologue," the past continues to shape the South, giving birth to modern conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and a nascent school choice movement that includes charter schools as well as vouchers, special education tax credits, private school tuition tax credits, and other legislative efforts aimed at breaking the public school monopoly (Christensen, 2008; Kruse, 2005). This chapter provides a review of the broader historical and cultural contexts and complex social phenomena influencing the discourses that serves as the locus of this study, and outlines the literature regarding charter school efficacy. Social-justice issues of inclusivity and equity in relation to charter schools are also explored.

The Past as Prologue to the Present

Obtaining public monies to create specialized schools for targeted populations of students is not a new concept in the South (Mullen et al., 2013). From laws adopted as early as 1740 forbidding the teaching of slaves to read and write to the legal segregation of the races during the Jim Crow era, the doctrine of separate and unequal coldly, systematically, and ruthlessly regulated every public institution and every aspect of life in the South (Bell, 1980; Mullen et al.,

2013; West, 1993). In the words of one former slave, “It is a saying among the masters, the bigger fool the better nigger. Hence all knowledge, except what pertains to work, is systematically kept from the field-slaves” (Bibb, 1851; Mullen et al., 2013). In North Carolina, in reaction to federal limitations on slavery’s growth as an industry and an epidemic of slave insurrections, the General Assembly consolidated the legal and systematic oppression of people of color into one massive law in 1855 (Mullen et al., 2013). Dictating in minute detail the daily lives of more than half of North Carolina’s population, the Act “Concerning Slaves and Free Persons of Color” made teaching a slave to read or write a crime (Mullen et al., 2013).

Transgressing this heinous statute, first adopted in 1830 (NCGA), resulted in swift and severe punishment:

> If any slave shall teach or attempt to teach, any other slave to read or write, the use of figures excepted, he or she may be carried before any justice of
> the peace, and on conviction thereof, shall be sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes on his or her bare back. (section 29)

Thus, while all but one North Carolina County agreed to tax citizens when legislation was passed that established the state’s free educational system, only poor whites were eligible for enrollment. Slaves, the children of free men of color, people of “mixed blood,” and Native Americans were still not deemed worthy of education (Moore, 1901; Mullen et al., 2013; NCGA, 1831).

Other laws in the Deep South went even further, outlining stiff financial penalties and corporal punishment for whites caught educating slaves and other persons of color. Whites could not employ or use persons of color in positions that required skill in reading, writing, and mathematics (Mullen et al., 2013). In Virginia, for example, “all meetings or assemblages of slaves, or free negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating with such slaves at any meeting-house or houses,” or in any “school or schools” for “teaching them reading and writing” were declared unlawful in 1819 (Mullen et al., 2013). The law also allowed “any justice of the peace” to “inflict

corporal punishment" not to exceed 20 lashes on "the offender or offenders" (Virginia House of Delegates, 1819, Rev. Code, 424-5). Similar laws oppressed free black men, who ranked behind whites and even some slaves in terms of social and legal standing. Slaves were offered some protections as the valuable property of white men (Moore, 1901).

As the future of slavery inflamed North and South, suffrage and other rights that had been granted earlier in the South were now denied to free men of color in North Carolina by action of the State Convention in 1835 (Moore, 1901). A former Confederate major and wealthy landowner, Moore (1901) wrote a history text that was required reading in North Carolina public schools from 1879 to 1901. As Moore's textbook indicates, the rationalization for denying suffrage to free black men reflects the explicit racism and white supremacy that pervaded the Jim Crow era, fueled white resistance to school integration, and still permeates today's less explicit yet just as pervasive forms of color-blind racism:

> As a class they were unthrifty and dishonest, and each year becoming more useless as members of the community; their association with the slaves regarded as an evil to be avoided if possible, therefore, they were discriminated against in the legislation of the period. (Moore, 1901, p. 161)

Impact of Jim Crow on Public Schools

White resistance to educating people of color in the South intensified during the post-Civil War reconstruction era. Slavery was replaced with a new, more insidious form of oppression known as Jim Crow (Goldstein, 2006; Massey, 1990; Mullen et al., 2013; Wolpe, 1972, 1986). Codified into state laws and local ordinances, Jim Crow governed and constrained every detail of black life, from the use of toilets and drinking fountains to educational and professional opportunities (Wolpe, 1972, 1986; Irons, 2002). Black citizens in America were denied the most basic human and civil rights (Wolpe, 1972, 1986; Irons, 2002) Transgressions were punished swiftly and often brutally (Goldstein, 2006; Irons, 2002; Massey, 1990; Wolpe,

1972, 1986). According to Irons (2002), "The educational status of blacks in the Jim Crow states remained abysmally low in 1950, falling below the level of whites in 1930" (p. 40).

When the federal courts ordered the end of segregated schools, elected officials tried to subvert desegregation plans by diverting public funding to private schools (Mullen et al., 2013). As Bonastia (2012a) notes, "The now-popular idea of offering public education dollars to private entrepreneurs has historical roots in white resistance to school desegregation after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The desired outcome was few or, better yet, no black students in white schools" (para. 2). In Prince Edward County, Virginia, for example, lawmakers shut down the newly integrated public school system while diverting taxpayer funds to segregated private schools in a parental-choice scheme eerily prescient of the modern day private school tuition voucher movement (Bonastia, 2012b; Mullen et al., 2013). As a Prince Edward newspaper publisher wrote in 1959,

> We are working [on] a scheme in which we will abandon public schools, sell the buildings to our corporation, reopen as privately operated schools with tuition grants from [Virginia] and P.E. county as the basic financial program. those wishing to go to integrated schools can take their tuition grants and operate their own schools. To hell with 'em. (Bonastia, 2012a, para. 3)

White Resistance to Integration in North Carolina

Rather than close public schools, the NCGA supported white resistance to integration by ratifying the Pearsall Plan in 1956 to provide publicly funded tuition vouchers so white children could continue to attend segregated, white-only schools (Mullen et al., 2013). The Pearsall Plan also allowed schools and districts to close rather than integrate, and encouraged white parents to move their children to non-integrated schools, fueling massive white flight from the urban areas where working class and professional blacks lived to the suburbs, where redlining by banks and

real estate agents and other legal tools barred blacks from residency (Mullen et al., 2013). As Morgan (1980) notes,

> The intent of the legislation was perfectly clear; Governor Hodges told the General Assembly that the people of North Carolina expected them to do '*everything legally possible to prevent their children from being forced to attend mixed schools against their wishes*.' He did not intend to stand idly by '*while our public schools are ruined in the course of a sociological experiment to be carried out at the expense of our children.*' (para. 9)

To further codify white supremacy while attempting to calm the racial upheaval, the Pearsall Plan (North Carolina Department of Administration [NCDA], 2012), provided the following:

> 1. Authority for the General Assembly to provide from public funds financial grants to be paid toward the education of any child assigned against the wishes of his parents to a school in which the races are mixed—such grants to be available for education only in non-sectarian schools and only when such child cannot be conveniently assigned to a non-mixed public school.
>
> 2. Authority for any local unit created pursuant to law and under conditions to be prescribed by the General Assembly, to suspend by majority vote the operation of the public schools in that unit, notwithstanding present constitutional provisions for public schools.

Although the Pearsall Plan was later declared unconstitutional by a federal court and was never implemented, the threat of integrated schools gave birth to several private and sectarian schools across the state (Mullen et al., 2013). Typically, these segregation academies were founded either in the decades following *Brown,* or in the aftermath of 1972's seminal *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education,* which legalized the use of busing for integration (Clotfelter, 2004; Howard, 1992; NCDA, 2012; Mullen et al., 2013). Interestingly, at the same time the NCGA adopted the Pearsall Plan, it also crafted legislation to supervise the use of public monies by private schools (Mullen et al., 2013). As Morgan (1980) notes,

> Since grants of public money were involved, this creation of a system of quasi-public schools under nominal private control would require the legal transplantation of the State's supervisory authority over public schools to the non-public sector—something that the non-public school regulatory law, enacted a year before the Pearsall Plan, provided for very neatly and conveniently. It seems clear, then, that a detailed scheme of private school regulation entered the law books in North Carolina not because lawmakers felt a check was needed on private schools actually operating in the State, but as part of a contingency plan to sidestep the desegregation of public schools on the basis of a legal technicality. (para. 10)

Such widespread concern regarding public schools in North Carolina was relatively new. Since planters and other elite members of Southern society typically sent their children to exclusive private schools in North Carolina, or along the Eastern seaboard, they had little incentive to worry about public school quality and funding (Christensen, 2008; Harlan, 1958; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004). This so-called "planter mentality" resulted in the chronic underfunding of K-12 education in Southern states both prior to the Civil War and after Reconstruction, when Northern philanthropists sent school teachers to educate the freedmen and plant the Northeastern public school concept on southern soil (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). As a "Southern Negro teacher" told federal investigators in 1901:

> When you have no schoolhouse, and when you have no teacher, why call it a school system? If you must take a little old, tumbledown log hut, with no desks or blackboard or map or text-books, expect a blue-back speller here and there, and the man who teaches can hardly count his cotton weights, and school only lasts three months a year, can you say that is an American school system? Even if exceptions for the better exist, this condition of things bears as heavily on the poor whites as on the negro. We live in a land of one-room cabins, mere crop-mortgaged peasants (Harlan, 1958, p. 4).

Lingering Planter Mentality Constrains Progress

The aristocratic tradition continued when furniture, textile, and tobacco production rose to prominence in the South (Mullen et al., 2013). While textile-mill owners built and ran public schools for their workers' children, the quality of education was often poor and served more as a means of ensuring future workers than improving the lives of poor whites (Harlan, 1958; Korstad

& Jones, 2000; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Walters & James, 1992). Like the plantation masters and slaveholders before them, many textile-mill owners feared that too much worker education would result in a more modern form of revolution: unionization (Korstad & Jones, 2000; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004; Walters & James, 1992).

As a result, the planter mentality of minimizing educational and economic opportunities for all but the wealthy elite oppressed poor whites, Native Americans, Catholics, certain immigrants, and others deemed inferior in the Deep South as well as the descendants of slaves and other people of color (Harlan, 1958; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004; Walters & James, 1992). While public schools and a growing middle class flourished in the Northeast, the South's white public schools, which served the rural poor and the sons and daughters of textile mill workers in urban areas, struggled with poor facilities, minimal supplies, low teacher wages, and other ills (Harlan, 1958; Korstad & Jones, 2000; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Walters & James, 1992).

In North Carolina, which proudly enshrines public education in its Constitution and lays claim to the first public university in the United States (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), the dichotomy shows both the promise and peril of using public funds to educate the children of the elite at the expense of everyone else (Mullen et al., 2013). According to Pearsall (1988), son of the plan's originator:

> The planters knew that their children were going to the University at Chapel Hill, okay. So they made damn sure through the legislature that the university got well-funded so their children would get well-educated. And everybody who was left behind picked up what was left 'cause it was done on a local basis not on a statewide basis. And I think they assumed there would be some trickle down opportunity or advantage to those who were left behind. That you would have this enlightened leadership educated at the university level. Now, that type of attitude has to reverse itself and I think he [Thomas Pearsall, chairman, Governor's Special Advisory Committee on Education, 1954] saw that number one, the strength of a democratic society is having a good, solid, free public education system. (p. 24)

The Pearsall Plan and other Southern legal strategies by the ruling elite to resist integration were eventually overcome by federal courts and unrelenting public pressure as the nation gathered around its new television sets, watching with horrified fascination as television news reports compared and contrasted the dignity, eloquence, and grace of civil rights protestors with angry, ill-educated, hate-spewing, and violent Southern whites (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; West, 1993).

While federal policy, court cases, and the appeal to justice undoubtedly helped the cause, the economic fallout of the South's racist policies also came into play (Bell, 1980; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). With Jim Crow exposed to the world in all its ugliness, and with the world still reeling from the genocide of Jews, Gypsies, Catholics, the disabled, and other undesirables in Germany, the combined power of bus boycotts and business disruption caused by sit-ins throughout the South began to have a negative effect on the region's economy (Bell, 1980; Harlan, 1958; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; West, 1993). Reluctantly, and despite continued white resistance, the South slowly began to change, at least on its more genteel surface (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013).

Economic Imperative Fuels Change

During the post-Civil Rights era, the South began to experience an unparalleled economic boom (Christensen, 2008; Hanchett, 1998; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Schulman, 1994). Deserting the high-wage Rust Belt of the Midwest and Northeast in droves, major corporations began to relocate in the South and Southeast, attracted by a pro-business, anti-union climate that kept wages, cost of living, and taxes low (Hanchett, 1998; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Schulman, 1994). As new executives, professionals, and educated middle class workers poured into the South, expectations for and dissatisfaction with North Carolina's public schools began to rise (Aoki, 1995; Chafe, 1981; Chang and Aoki, 1997; Christensen, 2008; Diette & Ovelere,

2012; Galliard, 1988; Griesbach, 2011; Hollifield, Hunt, & Tichenor, 2008; Jaret, 1999; Johnson, Johnson-Webb, & Farrell, 1999; Kaya & Karakoc, 2012; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004; Weeks, Weeks, & Weeks, 2006). With educational quality now seen as an economic imperative, governors and other elected officials made improving public schools a top priority (Christensen, 2008; Hanchett, 1998; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Schulman, 1994).

Hunt Era Prioritizes Public Schools

In North Carolina, four-term Governor Jim Hunt led the state from 1977 to 1985 and again from 1993 to 2001, overseeing its rise as a New South economic and education success story (Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004). Governor Hunt pushed for higher academic standards and accountability systems based on standardized testing, and promoted early childhood education as key to ameliorating the impact of poverty on learning and student success (Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004). Governor Hunt also helped establish The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and pushed the legislature to adopt the standards for North Carolina teachers and to increase their pay (Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004). Test scores began to rise, as did North Carolina's reputation for public school quality (Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004). Teacher pay, once near the bottom nationally, also became more competitive with neighboring states and the rest of the country (Mullen et al., 2013; UNC, 2004).

As the state pushed forward educationally and Hunt earned national recognition as a leading advocate of reform, festering resentment about desegregation among native North Carolinians found new allies in suburban newcomers (Galliard, 1988; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). A generation removed from the South's bitter integration battles and insulated from first-hand knowledge of the most painful aspects of Jim Crow, the new arrivals snapped up new houses in the suburbs and wanted good public schools that would help their children achieve the

necessary credentials, such as high SAT and ACT scores, to get into the right colleges and universities (Chafe, 1981; Galliard, 1988; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013).

These new suburban residents moved from Northern and Midwestern states where small, local school districts and high-achieving—and often highly segregated—neighborhood schools in bedroom communities were the norm (Andrews, 2002; Chafe, 1981; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Galliard, 1988; Hanchett, 1998; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). Having escaped busing for integration by fleeing to the suburbs in metropolitan areas where integration did not cross city lines, many were surprised to find out that their children might not get to attend the schools closest to their homes, and that poor children of color might be bused from the city to the suburbs to attend those schools instead (Galliard, 1988; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). Others were empathetic to the need to improve schools in poor neighborhoods, just not at the expense—or perceived expense—of their own children (Andrews, 2002; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Chafe, 1981; Galliard, 1988; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013).

The Call for School Reform

Not long after newly integrated schools began yielding better academic outcomes for poor, black children in the South, white resistance and anxiety began to emerge as a call for higher standards, better discipline, and neighborhood schools (Apple, 2006; Chafe, 1981; Galliard, 1988; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Stephen & Stephen, 1985). With school integration and affirmative action gaining ground, white resistance and resentment intensified (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). Soon, 1983's *A Nation at Risk* painted a dire picture of public school quality, citing a "rising tide of mediocrity" (Mullen et al., 2013; The National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 9).

A Nation at Risk spawned 30 years of educational reform in the U.S., and reawakened the once dormant idea of using public funding to create alternatives to traditional public schools and

provide tuition tax credits and vouchers for students opting to attend private and parochial schools (Mullen et al., 2013). This time, white resistance was rewrapped and repackaged as the "right" for all students to attend so-called "neighborhood schools" that did not require massive, cross-city busing (Mullen et al., 2013). The fact that well-documented housing patterns would re-segregate public schools was ignored, or dismissed as the benign and natural outcome of personal preferences rather than the vestiges of legal segregation, discrimination, and institutional racism (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Galliard, 1988; Kluger, 2011; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; West, 1993).

As part of this rhetorical shift, local public schools became "government" schools, conjuring the bogeyman of federal interventions in Southern affairs that began before the nation was born. In the new vernacular, districts were recast by pro-charter advocates as inefficient and expensive bureaucracies that stymied innovation and cared more about balancing racial quotas than the needs of individual children (Mullen et al., 2013). As Kruse (2005) notes, "In moving their resistance into the mainstream, these whites managed not only to legitimize their cause but to place themselves in positions of influence for the next rounds of resistance" (p. 77).

Desegregation Gains Dismissed

Despite significant evidence to the contrary, desegregation was dismissed as a failed social and educational policy that placed undue burdens on children who had to travel too far from their homes and taxpayers who had their hard-earned dollars wasted on buses rather than classroom instruction (Apple, 2006; Mullen et al., 2013). Rather than waste taxpayer dollars on busing and magnet schools, school systems should focus their resources on making every school a high quality school that any child would want to attend (Mullen et al., 2013). The fact that such schools would once again isolate children by race and socioeconomic status were the unfortunate

by products of their parents' poor choices, not the result of more than 400 years of systemic, legal, and dehumanizing oppression (Mullen et al., 2013).

When parents and national public opinion polls throughout the 1980s and 1990s continued to show strong preferences for traditional public schools over charter schools despite the rhetorical repackaging, school governance became the next target for ire of the pro-charter faction, followed by teacher unions, and teacher pensions. Eventually, reformers said the only way to save the nation's failing public schools was to break the government's monopoly on K-12 education by deregulating the system, and introducing market-based reforms such as charter schools (Goodman, 2004; Moe & Chubb, 2009; Stevenson, 1994; Mullen et al., 2013; Weber, 2010).

Ironically, even though the achievement gap between white and black students was at its narrowest in the late 1970s and early 1980s when desegregation policies were at their zenith, the pro-charter movement underwent yet another rhetorical metamorphosis (Apple, 2006; Mullen et al., 2013). Parental choice in public schooling became the new mantra, with the concept of choice cast as more democratic and egalitarian than public schools, even though charter schools are governed by private boards without public participation, or scrutiny (Mullen et al., 2013). Parents voted for neighborhood schools with their feet, relocating in droves to the suburbs where real estate values set the price for entry and determine school quality (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Ravitch, 2010; West, 1993).

Immigration Supports Economic Growth

As the new South settled into delayed and often reluctant compliance with court-ordered busing and desegregation plans, and as a growing businesses attracted more affluent suburban newcomers, new immigrants also began pouring into North Carolina and the South from Mexico and Central America, attracted by rapid job growth and the economic boom (Hanchett; 1998;

Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Rocha & Espino, 2009; Schulman, 1994). Latinos in urban areas began competing with poor whites and blacks for jobs and coveted seats in magnet schools and high-performing suburban schools, creating yet another bogeyman and rallying point for white resistance to integration—migration of Latino families from the West to the South along with immigration, particularly by undocumented immigrants (Aoki, 1995; Chang & Aoki, 1997; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Diette & Ovelere, 2012; Griesbach, 2011; Hollifield, Hunt, & Tichenor, 2008; Jaret, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999; Kaya & Karakoc, 2012; Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; Rocha & Espino, 2009; UNC, 2004; Weeks et al., 2006; Wilson, 2001). In rural areas, which missed out on the in-state migration that accounted for most of the state's population growth between 2000 and 2010 whites were the racial minorities in 76 North Carolina towns by 2013 (NC Rural Center, 2013).

While North Carolina's growing international business and university research sectors attracted a global elite of highly educated professionals, many of whom also sent their children to public schools, the state's churches and charitable organizations became more active in faith-based movements to resettle refugees from global conflicts in the United States (Mullen et al., 2013). As such, diversity in public schools in North Carolina's urban areas such as Greensboro, Durham, Charlotte, High Point, and Raleigh moved from black and white to an increasingly global mix, where first generation immigrants spoke dozens of world languages and dialects, and represented dozens of cultures and creeds (Clotfelter, 2004; Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Mullen et al., 2013). As urban areas served as refugee resettlement areas, for many immigrants, the public schools were their first experience with formal education (Clotfelter, 2004; Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Mullen et al., 2013). Mirroring the nation's changing demographics, whites were gradually becoming the minority in their communities and public schools in many North Carolina towns.

By 2013, North Carolina had 76 towns in which racial minorities held majority status (NC Rural Center, 2013).

Unlikely Allies Promote School Choice

With children of color, recent immigrants, English language learners, special education students, and the economically disadvantaged trapped by low incomes and the housing market in re-segregated neighborhood schools in urban areas, charter schools, tuition vouchers, tax credits, and other market-based reforms were now reframed in more socially sensitive terms. The freedom of parents to choose where their children attended schools, abbreviated and recoded simply as "choice," soon replaced earlier calls for "neighborhood schools." To refute claims of white resistance, the pro-charter coalition joined forces with black leaders frustrated by the tepid performance of many urban public schools.

Angered that black children had to bear most of the brunt of busing and by the closure of black neighborhood schools, and weary of educators who seemed to blame poor children of color for their failure, these unexpected pro-charter, pro-voucher allies promoted choice as a ticket out of poverty and despair for the urban poor. Nationally, charter schools tend to serve fewer white students and more African-American students (Eckes & Trotter, 2007; May, 2006). Charter schools also tend to serve slightly more students who qualify for the federal free and/or reduced-price lunch program, a common indicator of poverty, although such statistics vary widely state by state and within regions and local communities (Eckes & Trotter, 2007; May, 2006).

Charter Schools Reflect Cultural Divides

Research regarding charter school creaming or skimming of higher performing students from traditional public schools, and research seeking to determine whether charter schools actually serve harder-to-educate students also yields mixed results, with evidence to support either position varying by school to school, city to city, and region to region (Buckley, 2005).

Urban parents who have withdrawn their children from traditional public schools tend to report much higher satisfaction levels with charter schools, citing smaller class sizes, more individualized student attention, better teacher-parent communications, and a greater sense of community (May, 2006). These affective measures tend to outweigh concerns about academic achievement and the lack of empirical data regarding charter school efficacy (May, 2006). Parental preferences in school choice are heavily influenced by the availability of timely and clear information, however (Hastings, Van Weelden, & Weinstein, 2007).

In an experiment conducted in Charlotte, NC, when parents whose children qualify for free or reduced price lunch were shown a one page handout listing school names and test scores, their choice selections changed dramatically, and mirrored those of their more affluent peers, representing the equivalent of a $70,000 jump in income (Hastings et al., 2007). According to May (2006),

> The appeal of charter schools, wrote Viteritti (2002), is that some disadvantaged parents perceive school choice as a way to flee underperforming inner-city schools, in addition to providing a feeling of exclusivity. In fact, despite mixed reports of some students showing modest short-term gains in charter schools, parents continue to report satisfaction with their child's schooling. (Scherer, 2002, p. 25)

For many black parents and advocates, choice, charter schools, and tuition vouchers for private schools represent access to advantages previously perceived as a mainstay of white privilege. Within this framework, charter schools and other forms of public school choice offer an opportunity to reinvent public education in ways that better serve poor and minority students (Eckes & Trotter, 2007; May, 2006, p. 26; Wamba & Ascher, 2003; Tyack, 2003). Interestingly, both black and white parents engaged in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' magnet school choice program demonstrated similar racial preferences regarding student diversity, with both indicating

a preference for diverse schools as long as their children represented the majority (Hastings et al., 2008).

Overview of Charter School Literature

Choice as a Form of Equity

As equity becomes centered in choice, it is measured not by student outcomes on state standardized tests but by parental satisfaction and agency (Eckes & Trotter, 2007). Some see charters as offering greater educator control as well (Eckes & Trotter, 2007; Hastings et al., 2008; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). The hope is that by disrupting the sifting, sorting, and classifying system associated with traditional public schools and the white-controlled public school bureaucracy, charter school advocates will create more culturally competent and responsive schools, particularly for children of color and children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged who live in underserved communities without high-performing public school options (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Eckes & Trotter, 2007; Wamba & Ascher, 2003).

Within the pro-charter framework, educator resistance to charter school expansion may also be seen by some scholars as yet another form of white supremacy and patriarchy that seeks to maintain white control over black lives and black schools (Bell, 2004). As Wamba and Ascher (2003) note,

> Charter schools entered the national policy arena promising deregulation as a way to increase educational achievement for those students most poorly served by traditional public schools, that is, urban students of color. Indeed, many charter school advocates have relocated equity in choice, and school choice for communities of color is being called an essential but "unfinished task of the civil right movement." (Holt, 2000, p. 463)

Charters, Choice Gain Ground

Although some critical race scholars believe that the charter school movement is rooted in racism, the same could also be said about traditional public schools (Mullen et al., 2013).

Despite these concerns, all forms of public school choice are gaining popularity among a wide swath of parents (Bonastia, 2012a, 2012b; Buras, 2011, Buras & Apple, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). The act of simply making a choice increases parental satisfaction, particularly in families lacking the economic resources to buy, or rent homes in areas with preferred public schools, a fact that is not lost on elected officials (May, 2006). Even staunch public school advocates recognize that public schools are neither common nor free when housing costs and socioeconomic status determine school quality (Kruse, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013; West, 2001). As a black North Carolina Senator explained his pro-charter stance, "I just want good schools. I don't care who runs them" (Graham, 2011). Others take a more cynical view, one that sees the pro-charter movement as yet another form of advancing white property ownership and economic gain at the expense of poor and minority students (Buras, 2011; Mullen et al., 2013; Vaught, 2009). As Buras (2011) notes,

> . . . charter schools are less about responding to the needs of racially oppressed communities and more about the Reconstruction of a newly governed South—one in which white entrepreneurs (and black allies) capitalize on black schools and neighborhoods by obtaining public monies to build and manage charter schools. (p. 297)

Charters, Choice Yield Mixed Results

Despite more than 30 years of school reform after the publishing of *A Nation at Risk, 1983*'s seminal indictment of public education in the post-Civil Rights era, high-achieving public schools for children of color and the poor remain elusive in North Carolina and nationally (Mullen et al., 2013). While effective charter schools serving poor children of color are the subject of countless news reports and pro-charter documentary films such as "Waiting for Superman," academic results thus far have not kept pace with the media hype and political enthusiasm. Meanwhile, significant concerns linger regarding racial isolation, social justice, and equity (Apple, 2006; Buras, 2011; Mullen et al., 2013; West, 1993). A study of 2,330 students in

36 charter middle schools in 15 different states, for example, found that while parents and students were more satisfied with their schools, other measures of student performance did not vary significantly from similar children enrolled in traditional public schools (Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, Clark, & Dwoyer, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). Student attendance, grade promotion rates, discipline referrals, and test scores were all remarkably similar (Gleason et al., 2010; Mullen et al., 2013).

As with traditional public schools, Gleason et al. (2010) found that charter school effectiveness varies widely between and among schools. Some outperform traditional public schools; most do not. Similarly, a meta-analysis of the research literature on student achievement in charter schools by Betts and Tang (2011) also found mixed results, with some charter schools outperforming similarly situated public schools in reading and mathematics as measured by state achievement tests, and some charter schools underperforming their public school counterparts. In general, elementary and middle school charter schools are performing better than high school charter schools, although this also varies greatly from school to school, region to region, and state to state. According to May (2006),

> Predictions of charter school success have not been realized in many states, such as Colorado, Minnesota, Arizona, North Carolina (Greene et al., 2003), and Ohio. By standards established in the State of Ohio for instance, 87% of the charter schools are considered failing, and only 5% are rated as "excellent," as opposed to 12% of the traditional schools that are considered failing and 14% that are excellent. (Jewell, 2004) (p. 26)

Researchers also have found variance between and among schools operated by the same charter management organizations. As Betts and Tang (2011) noted, "The overall tenor of our results is that charter schools are in some cases outperforming traditional public schools in terms of students' reading and math achievement, and in other cases performing similarly or worse" (p. 55).

Two of the more comprehensive charter school studies were conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University in 2009 and 2013. These studies showed that traditional public schools either equal or outperform charter public schools all but 17 percent of the time in reading gains and all but 13% of the time in math gains in 2009. In 2013, despite an 80 percent growth in charter schools, results remained mixed, with traditional public schools equaling or outperforming charter schools all but 25% of the time in reading and all but 29% of the time in math (CREDO, 2013, pp. 56–57). The 2013 CREDO study showed charter schools were gaining on traditional public schools in terms of student performance, particularly in comparison to the results posted by charters schools in the 2009 CREDO study. Thus, while charter schools are catching up to traditional public schools in terms of performance, it is important to note that there was no significant difference between the learning gains of traditional public school and charter school students 56% of the time in reading and 40% of the time in math (CREDO, 2013, p. 57).

The 2013 CREDO study also indicated significant, state-by-state discrepancies in charter students' starting test scores. While most charter school students have starting reading and math test scores in the negative range as compared to their peers in traditional public schools, North Carolina charter school students enter their schools with the highest mean starting scores in reading and math (CREDO, 2013, p. 21). Charter school enrollment continued to have a negative impact on students' math scores as compared to those enrolled in traditional public schools in 2013, while reading scores, particularly for Black students, increased significantly for charter school students between 2009 and 2013 (CREDO, 2013, p. 32). Gains for charter school students living in poverty also increased significantly between 2009 and 2013 (CREDO, 2013, p. 32).

Whether this improvement in charter school student test scores represents better instruction, higher levels of student learning, the migration of higher performing students away

from public schools, or the natural growth of the charter school sector remains to be seen (Mullen et al., 2013). Ultimately, if charter school growth continues unfettered while enrollment in traditional public schools decreases, the balance in future studies will likely shift toward public school charters, as they typically do not educate an equitable share of challenging students (Fiori, Harwell, Blackorby, & Finnigan, 2000; Hehir, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013; Sugarman, 2002). Given the vast amount of research commissioned and publicized for partisan purposes by groups with specific public-policy agendas, it can be daunting for the general public to sort through the competing rhetoric and data. A focus on peer-reviewed research is often lost in this equation. It's not surprising, then, that the majority of Americans in 2013 indicated for the first time that charter schools typically outperform traditional public schools on the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll on education (PDK/Gallup, 2013).

Racial and Socioeconomic Isolation

Increasingly, charter schools are what some scholars call hyper-segregated, despite decades of research that shows "important benefits associated with attending diverse schools, and conversely, related educational harms in schools where poor and minority students are concentrated" (Mullen et al., 2013; Orfield, as cited in Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010, p. 5). As noted previously, such hyper-segregation also characterizes many traditional public schools, however (Irons, 2002). Concentrated in major metropolitan areas, charter schools are more likely to isolate minority students in racially segregated settings, although evidence is growing that charters contribute to growing white flight and middle class segregation in Southern states like North Carolina, where for-profit charter management companies appear target wealthier suburban areas (Mullen et al., 2013; Ni, 2012).

Studies of for-profit charter schools in Michigan and North Carolina, for example, reveal similar patterns of white community activism benefiting from colorblind educational policies and

public monies to create predominantly white, middle and upper middle class charter schools while contributing to race-based inequality and isolation (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004, 2006, 2006a, 2007; Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2009, 2009a; Mullen et al., 2013; Urrieta, 2006; Ni, 2012). In addition to racial isolation, evidence is mounting that many charter schools suffer from high student attrition rates, while skimming better performing students from the public school system. Parents in New Orleans and other major charter school districts report confusing and difficult application processes, and the active "counseling out" of hard-to-educate students (Buras, 2011; Mullen et al., 2013).

Nationally, despite state laws requiring charters to reflect the demographics of the community, charters fail to enroll their fair share of recent immigrants, English language learners, special education students, and homeless students (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). As Buras (2011) found,

> Accounts of formal exclusion from selective admissions charter schools are common enough. But stories of informal exclusion and problems of access—targeted student recruitment, laborious application procedures and deadlines, enrollment caps, parental steering and harassment, "pushing out," and periodic dumping from presumably open access charter schools—are widespread. (p. 297)

As much a political and ideological movement as an educational one, the charter school sector is growing rapidly, expanding from zero charter schools in 1990 to more than 1.6 million in 2010 (NCES, 2012). While a "major political success," the charter school movement "has been a civil rights failure" (Orfield, as cited in Frankenberg et al., 2010, p. 5) and a lucrative form of "big business that is likely to increase in size in the future" (English, Papa, Mullen, & Creighton, 2012, p. 41; Mullen, 2013). Many of the same criticisms are levied at traditional public schools, where housing values, local taxes, and the socioeconomic status of public school parents often

dictate school resources and quality, as well as student performance on standardized tests and other common measures of proficiency (Irons, 2002)

Special Education in Charters and Choice Schools

Whether and how well charters and other publicly funded choice schools serve students with disabilities also is a matter of debate, both in academia and in terms of public policy (Mullen et al., 2013). While charter school advocates are quick to highlight charter schools that focus on students with autism or other special learning needs, the reality is that few serve students with significant cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and developmental disabilities (Fiori et al., 2000; Hehir, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). Sugarman (2002) notes that the distribution of students with disabilities in charter schools varies widely, with some schools serving as "magnets for children with disabilities" while others either serve no students with disabilities or only those with mild learning disabilities that do not require major modifications of the curriculum or other instructional supports (p. 7). According to Sugarman,

> One key factor to appreciate here is that some charter schools either avoid enrolling, or don't really know much about teaching, special education pupils with anything more than very modest disabilities. Those schools are viewed in some quarters as shirking their fair share of these pupils. (p. 7)

Fiori et al. (2000) confirmed these findings in a national study of federal charter-grant recipients, noting that while the percentage of students with disabilities served mirrored national percentages overall, "charter school enrollment of students with more significant disabilities is relatively rare, except in schools specifically designed for these students" (p. 43). As Fiori et al. (2000) note,

> Throughout the nation, parents are enrolling their children with mild disabilities in charter schools. This enrollment occurs even in schools that do not offer special education services, provide individualized education programs (IEPs), or provide due process protections for those students. (p. 43)

Despite federal mandates governing special education in public schools, and most charter school laws requiring student enrollment to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, charter school operators openly discuss using pre-admission interviews, enrollment criteria, inadequate teacher preparation, waivers, lack of related services, and other barriers to discourage parents from enrolling children with disabilities (Mullen et al., 2013). As Fiori et al. (2000) indicate,

> Whether or not they conduct a pre-decision interview, administrators at approximately a fourth of the visited schools said that they were unable to serve certain students with disabilities and that they discouraged parents of some students with disabilities from enrolling their children in the charter school. (p. 24)

This "counseling out" process was frequently cited by charter school administrators as being in the child's best interest (Mullen et al., 2013). Other charter schools contracted with their local public school system to provide services for students with more significant or low-incidence disabilities, in essence looping harder to educate students back to traditional schools and denying them access to any publicly funded alternatives (Mullen et al., 2013). Similar patterns exist in North Carolina, although the cause is not clear (Mullen et al., 2013; NCDPI, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). For those parents of students with mild disabilities enrolled in the charter schools studied by Fiori et al. (2000), the majority expressed satisfaction with the quality of education their children received, although some voiced concern about the "lack of funds, limited resources, and poor facilities" (p. 40).

Limited or lack of access to co-curricular activities, adaptive materials, career and technical education courses, athletics, foreign languages, and the comprehensive curriculum found in most traditional public schools were also cited as concerns by some parents of students with disabilities (Mullen et al., 2013). "Few charter schools offer special education instruction per se that is any better than the special education instruction students received at previously attended

schools, according to parents and charter school staff," according to Fiori et al. (2000, p. 44). However, charter school parents and students with disabilities indicate that the smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction help offset negative effects from the lack of services (Fiori et al., 2000; Mullen et al., 2013; Sugarman, 2002).

New Orleans as a Cautionary Tale

Perhaps foreshadowing the future of other urban public school systems, New Orleans serves as a cautionary tale for those eager to replace traditional public school systems with an array of charter schools and private options (Mullen et al., 2013). Reformers have won accolades for replacing 70% of the city's public schools with charter schools since Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005 (Mullen et al., 2013). While touted by the pro-charter "Waiting for Superman" film and media hype as an unprecedented success story, outcomes for students with disabilities have deteriorated rapidly (Mock, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). Even though New Orleans charter schools enroll a smaller percentage of students with disabilities than the remaining public schools, charter schools have fewer disabled students performing on grade level or graduating from high school (Mock, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). New Orleans charter schools are also four times more likely to suspend students with disabilities from school than traditional public schools, prompting the Southern Poverty Law Center to file suit in 2010, alleging violations of federal special education and anti-discrimination laws (Mock, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013).

Federal Court papers filed in 2008 in Washington, DC, told a similar story about the growth of charter schools in the nation's capital, noting that charter schools were meeting federal guidelines for testing students with disabilities only 30 percent of the time and providing federally-mandated individualized education plans and special education services only 10 percent

of the time (Mullen et al., 2013; Myers, 2008; Turque, 2011). According to Nina Totenberg (Myers, 2008), as quoted in *The Washington Examiner*:

> Some schools were frank to concede that they would not admit students who required a large number of hours of specialized service or had specific diagnoses they were not equipped to serve. Such charters assume that they have no obligation to offer services to those students requiring the most intensive and extensive services—and refer the students for full-time therapeutic placement.

Similar concerns have been noted in news reports about charter schools in New York City, Little Rock, Indianapolis, Miami, Detroit, Cincinnati, and other major urban areas where charter schools are gradually replacing traditional public schools (Mullen et al., 2013). In Denver, charter school advocates responded by opening a segregated charter school for students with multiple disabilities, a move many disability rights advocates and special educators viewed as a major step backward (Meyer, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013).

Exclusion and Segregation in Public Schools

Charter schools are not the only public schools with exclusionary practices, however. Many magnet and public school choice programs reflect the same patterns of segregation and exclusion (Mullen et al., 2013). As Howell, Peterson, Wolf, and Campbell (2002), noted, "Schools do more than teach math and reading; they also prepare citizens to participate in a democracy. School choice, however, may only encourage racial isolation and intolerance." Although designed and conceived as more palatable alternative to busing for integration and as a means to "assist in the desegregation of public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students," according to the U.S. Department of Education's Magnet School Assistance Program website, magnet schools in major metropolitan areas are increasingly segregated by race, socioeconomic status, and ability/disability (Mullen et al., 2013).

Voucher programs and other attempts at creating public school choice programs seem to fare no better, although peer-reviewed studies and analyses of this important issue are lacking (Mullen et al., 2013). According to Frieden (2003), "IDEA rights, as a general rule, will not extend to children and youth with disabilities who participate in voucher programs" (p. 1). Frieden (2003) also says that special education has been left out of most school choice and voucher programs, and that no comprehensive study has examined whether such programs will enhance educational outcomes for disabled students (Mullen et al., 2013). As Frieden notes (2003),

> Because vouchers can only cover a portion of costs of special education over and above the cost of private school tuition in many cases, particularly for students with moderate, low-incidence and severe disabilities, such programs may benefit only the affluent who can afford to supplement vouchers to cover actual costs. Since school districts will lose students and a proportion of state funds due to transfers to private schools, it is possible that public schools will be left to serve only poor students with more significant disabilities, and at a reduced level of financial support. (p. 1)

Frieden (2003) also points out the inconsistency between federal policy's rhetorical emphasis on data- and evidence-driven programs, the growing reliance on public school choice as the preferred method for systemic school reform, and the lack of scientific evidence supporting this expansion, particularly in regard to students with disabilities (p. 1).

Public schools have made significant advances in educating students with disabilities since 1975's landmark federal legislation mandating a "free and appropriate public education" in the "least restrictive environment (LRE)" (Mullen et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Prior to 1975's Education for Handicapped Act (later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), exclusionary practices regarding students with disabilities were the norm in public schools and public school systems (Mullen et al., 2013). According to the National

Council on Disability website, “1.75 million children with disabilities received no educational services and an additional 2.5 million received an inappropriate education.”

Today, thanks to changes ushered in by the 1997 amendments to IDEA as well as the adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, more students with disabilities now have access to the general education curriculum and are included in state assessments and accountability systems (Mullen et al., 2013). As a result, special education is merging with other classroom and whole-school reform efforts, particularly where inclusive and collaborative educational practices are the norm (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; McLeskey & Waldron, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 13.4% of U.S. students enrolled in public schools have disabilities (2012). Of this number, the vast majority—95%—are educated in regular schools (Mullen et al., 2013). Once relegated to segregated classrooms, trailers, dedicated hallways, basements, and separate schools, more students with disabilities now have access to general education classrooms, and, more importantly, the general education curriculum (Lipsky, 2005; Mullen et al., 2013). According to Worrell (2008), 76.3% of students with disabilities spend all or part of the day in general education classrooms in the United States (Mullen et al., 2013).

Interestingly, the movement toward more inclusive education for students with significant disabilities has occurred during the same time period as the movement to expand charter schools and public school “choice” programs (Mullen et al., 2013). Philosophically, these two movements appear to conflict (Mullen et al., 2013). Federal laws and policies strongly emphasize placement in the least restrictive, or most inclusive, environment before separate classes, separate schools, and other more restrictive placement options are considered (Mullen et al., 2013). Yet charter schools, by nature, are free from many of the regulations and bureaucratic oversight of the traditional public school system in order to spur innovation (Mullen et al., 2013).

While state charter school laws technically reflect federal policy regarding serving students with disabilities, the reality is that few, if any, serve students with significant cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or developmental disabilities—the very student populations targeted for more inclusive practices in traditional public schools and school systems (Estes, 2004; Fiori et al., 2000; Hehir, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013). Thus, while the education of students with disabilities has improved overall, new and troubling forms of exclusion and segregation have emerged. The exclusion of students with disabilities from general magnet and choice schools, or where tuition tax-credit vouchers are provided for private schools, is often due to highly selective application and enrollment criteria (Estes, 2004; Hehir, 2010; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998; Mullen et al., 2013; Sugarman, 2002).

As a result, there is growing concern that the federal push for more charter schools and greater "choice" in public education will result in students with significant disabilities having fewer, and more restrictive and segregated choices than those afforded to their non-disabled peers (Mullen et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the rapid growth and popularity of these publicly financed alternatives continues unabated, even though students with intellectual, emotional, behavioral, and the most significant disabilities are often left out of the equation (Estes, 2004; Fiori et al., 2000; Hehir, 2010; Mullen et al., 2013).

Dual System Re-emerges

While charter school legislation and randomized lotteries for student selection ostensibly provide equitable access for all students, a deeper analysis of charter school data increasingly points to the creation of a two-tiered system, particularly in states with large numbers of charter schools operated by or subcontracted to for-profit charter school management companies, and large numbers of private school to charter school conversions (Mullen et al., 2013; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). As Wamba and Ascher (2003) note, "In Michigan, where management companies

run 70% of all charter schools, as these organizations have tried to steer clear of high-cost students, they have homogenized student enrollment and shifted their charter schools from urban to suburban areas (Miron, 2000)" (p. 464). In addition to avoiding serving students with disabilities, the lack of transportation, school breakfast and lunch, after-school care, special education, bilingual education, and other services often preclude attendance by homeless and other disadvantaged students—particularly the poorest of the poor, and those with the lowest test scores (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004, 2006, 2006a, 2007; Bifulco et al., 2009, 2009a; Mullen et al., 2013).

Equity issues also arise given the variability in parents' access to information when making school choice decisions (Mullen et al., 2013; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). Marketing methods and messages target specific students and their parents while excluding others (Mullen et al., 2013; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). Such targeting in student recruitment occurs along racial, academic, ability/disability, cultural, gender, and geographic lines. As Eckes and Trotter (2007) note,

> The school leaders interviewed were eager to have some greater representation of racial diversity; however, most felt that there was also a tipping point between providing students with the opportunity to learn with students of other races and maintaining the mission of the schools, which would be threatened by the attendance of too many White students. (p. 83)

Some charter school themes also reflect thinly veiled religious agendas, and may signal parents that only certain students are welcome (Garcia, 2008; Mullen et al., 2013; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). Garcia (2008) identified five typical charter school types: (a) At-Risk; (b) Back to Basics; (c) Montessori; (d) Traditional; and (e) Traditional with Native American Focus (p. 601). While Garcia's study focused on Arizona, the Traditional with a special cultural or programmatic focus (African American, Latino, Islamic, Hebrew, special education) tends to hold true

nationwide. As Garcia (2008) notes, “Charter schools vary considerably by type and mission, and these characteristics can have an impact on the student body composition of specialized charter schools (Wong & Shen, 2000)” (p. 600).

Despite their enthusiasm about choice, when parents sort and sift their children’s educational opportunities, their selections often reflect and reproduce the same social inequities currently found in traditional public schools, with minority and economically disadvantaged parents/family members more likely to choose vocationally oriented charter schools for their children (Garcia, 2008; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). White and economically advantaged parents, on the other hand, tend to choose more academically oriented, higher-performing charter schools (Garcia, 2008; Wamba & Ascher, 2003).

In an extensive study of Arizona charter schools, for example, Garcia (2008) found that students leave district schools with racially diverse student bodies to attend charter schools with less racial diversity. Garcia (2008) also found that the degree of “academic exposure” remained about the same in district and charter schools, with the possible exception of “back to basics” elementary schools, which tend to attract higher performing white students, and at-risk high school charters, which tend to attract more low-performing minority students.

The “weak and inconsistent” relationship between academic focus/program specialization and racial segregation raises significant questions regarding choice specialization theory, which holds that racial segregation in charter schools is the natural outcome and expected result of program specialization and focus rather than racial prejudice, discrimination, or exclusionary practices. As Garcia (2008) concludes,

> The contradictory academic and racial patterns for Back-to-Basics charter elementary schools lend credence to the possibility that these types of schools may be attracting or excluding students for reasons other than the specialized focus of the school. Back-to-Basics charter schools have been advertised as free alternatives to fundamentalist, Christian private schools (Golden, 1999), and the teaching of religious principles is

> embedded in the back to basics movement (McMillan, 1981). The association between back to basics and religion in a choice setting may be attracting a White, homogenous student population. (p. 607)

Since equity provisions regarding racial and socioeconomic balance in most state's charter school laws are rarely monitored or enforced, the current pattern of hyper-segregation of students by race, class, and ability in charter schools promises to continue unabated. The same holds true for equity concerns regarding student enrollment, educational quality and service access, teacher, principal and staff quality, instructional materials and supplies, instructional technology, media center materials, facilities, co-curricular activities, and transportation—issues eerily reminiscent of the six Green factors the courts used to determine whether school districts had eliminated all vestiges of intentional segregation (Tulane University, 2012).

The next chapter explains the relevance of this study and its potential contributions to the research literature and policy makers. Chapter III also introduces the reader to the research questions that form the basis of this study, which seeks to gain a greater understanding of how charter schools have gained more social, economic, and cultural power in North Carolina. This chapter also provides an overview of critical discourse analysis and explains how this research method is ideally suited to studying the growing charter school movement, which is a complex, social phenomenon with significant social-justice implications. Details also are provided regarding the rationale and process used to select the texts for analysis, as well as the tools used to capture and interpret the data.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

> Access to public education in the United States is complete, universal, and compulsory. As such, it is also the only public service that functions as a form of social entitlement, a 'positive right' and social good provided to citizens and noncitizens alike. (Noguera, 2003, p. 7)

Why This Study Matters

As an ideological and political movement, charter schools are an unequivocal public relations success, despite achieving limited and mixed empirical results in terms of improving student learning and regardless of lingering doubts regarding the scalability and exclusivity of charter schools (Bartlett et al., 2002; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Betts & Tang, 2011; Bulkley et al., 2010; Buras & Apple, 2005; CREDO, 2009, 2013; Sirota, 2014; Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Erickson, 2011; Gerwitz et al., 2004; Gleason et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2009; May, 2006, Robelen, 2009). With bipartisan support, charter schools in the United States are experiencing unprecedented growth (CREDO, 2009, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; May, 2006). Since 2008-2009, the number of charter schools in the U.S. has grown by 80% (CREDO, 2013). This major public policy shift is already underway in North Carolina as well, with the number of charter schools in North Carolina predicted to double by as early as 2018 (Ash, 2014). Despite rapid growth, and the sector's widespread popularity with parents (BAEO, 2013; Cowen, 2008; Fusarelli, 2003; Garcia, 2008; Hanushek et al., 2007; Heilig & Holme, 2013; Jin & Rubin, 2009), charter schools remain hotly contested (Betts & Young, 2011; Bonastia, 2012a; Buras, 2011; Buras & Apple, 2005; Cho et al., 2013; Davis, 2013; Erickson, 2011).

In North Carolina, which in many ways serves as a microcosm of the United States in terms of changing demographics, the intersection of race and class is particularly acute (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, 2007; Bifulco et al., 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2002; Ladd, 2012; Massey, 1990; Mock, 2010; Morgan, 1980; Mullen et al., 2013; NCDPI, 2014; Omi & Winant, 1994). Meanwhile, under North Carolina's conservative leadership in the executive and legislative branches, the largely unregulated charter school sector continues to expand unabated at the same time that funding for public schools continues to contract and regulatory burdens continue to increase (Ash, 2014; Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, 2007; Bifulco et al., 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2002; Ladd, 2012; Mullen et al., 2013; NCSBA, 2011, 2012, 2013; NCDPI, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

To help elucidate how charter schools have gained more social, economic, and cultural power in North Carolina, this study conducts a critical analysis of political discourse in the media. The purpose is to investigate the strategic use of language, power, and ideology during the evolution of charter school policy in North Carolina by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of editorial-page items about charter schools published by 20 daily newspapers during nearly a 20-year period.

Research Questions

More specifically, this study analyzes how charter schools have been framed in editorial-page items from about one year prior to the opening of the state's first charter school in 1996 to the start of the 2014-15 academic year, as it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How have charter schools and the charter school movement been framed in news accounts, editorials, and letters to the editor in North Carolina daily newspapers?
2. What ideologies, power structures, and social actors are represented in these political discourses?

3. How have race and class factored into the promotion of public policies favorable to charter schools in North Carolina?
4. What can we learn from the public relations and political success of the charter school movement?

Methodology

Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

With its theoretical roots in a variety of academic disciplines, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged during the last half of the twentieth century as a particularly potent means to examine power relations in society, and the role of language in maintaining power for one group at the expense of others (Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Faircloth, 1993, 2001; Janks, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 1988, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In particular, CDA concerns itself with purpose and impact of discourses, as well as its explicit and implicit meanings. CDA seeks to uncover implicit bias and dissect social constructions, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, that are created and used by dominant groups in a society to justify and maintain power over subordinate groups (Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Faircloth, 1993, 2001; Janks, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

As Faircloth (1993, p. 6) notes, "Discourses include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries—representations of how things might or could or should be." As a result, CDA is particularly well-suited to studying the role of political discourse in shaping public preferences for public policies impacting public education such as charter schools. The focus of CDA is on the impact of discourse, rather than on the facts or scientific knowledge undergirding individual texts (de Wet, 2001). As de Wet (2001) explains, "Texts are examined

for their effects rather than their accuracy; the question is 'What do texts do?', not 'What do texts say?' Discourses aim to construct particular truths" (p. 100). In its Foucaultian quest to make the hidden known, CDA seeks to serve a dual function as both research and social action (Buras & Apple, 2005; Faircloth, 1993; Jager & Meyer, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Applying a Critical Lens

CDA "assumes that political discourse is (and ought to be) carried out through a critical lens and that CDA is, at its core, a political endeavor" as it probes and makes manifest the explicit and implicit meanings embedded in political talk, text, images, and sounds (Dunmire, 2012, p. 738). CDA is particularly concerned with the discourses associated with the struggle "over power, meaning, and material resources" (Dunmire, 2012, p. 738). By examining political discourse, CDA seeks to identify how meaning is assigned, interpreted, and legitimized by political actors, including newspaper editors and publishers (Dunmire, 2012; Fischer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2009; Hoffman & Slater, 2007; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b). CDA analyzes acts of oppression, collaboration, and resistance as it seeks to identify alternative meanings and solutions to public policy challenges (Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Brader, Valention, & Suhay, 2008; Brendl, Higgins, & Lemm, 1995; Brewer & Kramer, 1986; De Vreese, 2005; de Wet, 2001; Domke, 2001; Dunegan, 1993; Dunmire, 2012; Faircloth, 1993, 2001; Janks, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Often conducted from the standpoint of the marginalized in public policy debates, CDA serves as a form of political action by raising alternative views and perspectives, and by questioning the status quo (Dunmire, 2012; Faircloth, 1993, 2001; Janks, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this manner, critical theorists

serve as what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as the "left hand" of the state, which may include members of the academy as well as teachers, principals, and other highly educated government professionals (as cited in Dunmire, 2012, p. 739).

Struggle over Meaning, Power

This struggle over meaning lies at the heart of the political process in the United States and other democracies (Campbell, 2002; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Dunmire, 2012; Fischer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2009; Lippmann, 1946; Neuman et al., 1992; Rich et al., 2011; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).The way in which issues are framed by elected officials and other elites in the public sphere influences public opinion, which in turn helps shape public policy as disparate voices coalesce regarding the root cause of the problem and the preferred solution for solving it (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Briggs, 2012; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Campbell, 2002; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Cohen, 2010; De Vreese, 2005; de Wet, 2001; Dewey, 2012; Dunegan, 1993; Entman, 1993, 2007; Fleishman, 1988; Fine, 1992; Goffman, 1974; Hallahan, 1999). As elected officials and other social actors vie to define the rules, structure, and outcomes of political discourse in the public sphere, they often use words, phrases, and stories that cue and trigger the emotional responses of constituencies who share their worldview (Brader et al., 2008; Brendl et al., 1995; Brewer & Kramer, 1986; De Vreese, 2005; Domke, 2001; Dunegan, 1993; Dunmire, 2012; Fischer, 2003; Fleishman, 1988; Neuman, 1992; Sears & Kinder, 1985; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Implicit and value-laden, these codes signal in-group and out-group membership, and trigger emotional, psychological, and political action among the intended audience (Brader et al., 2008; Brendl et al., 1995; Brewer & Kramer, 1986; de Wet, 2001; Domke, 2001; Dunegan, 1993; Dunmire, 2012; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson,

1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). By carefully selecting data, information, and ideas that give preference to one group's ideology over another, social actors then filter out conflicting worldviews and perspectives (Borah, 2011; Briggs, 2012; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Campbell, 2002; Cohen, 2010; Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine, 1992; van Dijk, 1988, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Goffman, 1974; Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 1999; Kruse, 2005; Kymlicka, 2001; Lippmann, 1946; Neuman et al., 1992; van Dijk, 1988, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As such, CDA recognizes that the discourse of political actors is never neutral, and that the rhetorical strategies employed by those in power often serve to accrue social benefits to one group at the expense of others (Faircloth, 1993; van Dijk, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005). In this manner, discourse itself is seen as a form of power, as is the control of discourse (de Wet, 2001; van Dijk, 2009, 2011).

News Media as Significant Discursive Sites

The news media plays a prominent role in public discourse that helps shape public opinion, and ultimately, the public policies that allocate government resources and services, including public education (Entman, 1993, 2007; Goffman, 1974). As a result, greater access to the news media also results in more elite leaders having greater influence over the topics and issues that comprise the public agenda (Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine, 1992; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992). Through the close reading and structured examination of political discourse, CDA examines these processes and exposes the underlying assumptions that may not be readily apparent (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Dunmire, 2012; Neuman et al., 1992; Schwalbe, 2008; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Through this process, CDA seeks to uncover and make manifest the process in which the root cause of the problem and preferred public policy solution become normalized, recognizing that as resistance fades and opposing public policy options become marginalized, so does data and research that argues against the preferred solution (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Dunmire, 2012; Neuman et al., 1992; Schwalbe, 2008; van Dijk, 1988, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Grounded in critical theory, CDA recognizes that the slow silencing of disparate voices leads to inaccurate, incomplete, and at times, oppressive and discriminatory assessments about why things are the way they are in a given society (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Appiah & Guttman, 1996; Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Dunmire, 2012; Neuman et al., 1992; Schwalbe, 2008; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, 2009, 2011; Wenden, 2005; Widdowson, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) . When this occurs, more inequitable social outcomes are the inevitable result (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2006, Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu, 1997; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Dunmire, 2012; Schwalbe, 2008; Wenden, 2005).

The Role of Framing

Faced with time and format constraints, journalists must boil down complex social issues by selecting, emphasizing, de-emphasizing, and omitting certain information. This selection process is referred to as framing and is used to make sense of the often complex and disjointed pieces of information that flow from myriad sources (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Reporters use framing to package, compress, and simplify news for public consumption, and to fit structural constraints imposed by limited reporting and broadcast time, column inches, allowable number of characters (letters, numbers, and symbols in social media parlance), and audience attention spans (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Framing is ideally conducted in adherence to professional

journalism's ethical commitment to fairness, accuracy, balance, and neutrality (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Matthes, 2009; McQuail, 1994, 2010; Scheufele, 2000). Whether post-modern journalistic practice matches theory is increasingly open to debate, especially as its professional norms are challenged by competitive pressures and the digital revolution (Lewis, 2012; Singer, 2010).

Social and political actors also use frames to identify the root causes of social problems, discuss options, and propose their preferred solutions. As noted previously, such framings are rarely neutral and often reflect the framer's worldview and ideological perspectives. Elected officials use framing to influence public perception, and convince their constituents to accept, or oppose a proposed public policy, or candidate position on an issue (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Matthes, 2009; McQuail, 2010; Scheufele, 2000; Wenden, 2005). School board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers use framing to persuade parents that a new reading program is in the best interest of their children, or to explain why they support the higher academic standards embedded in the Common Core State Standards. Advocates use framing to explain why their cause is just and merits public policy consideration, funding, or some other societal response. Within CDA, the framing of ideas embedded in text, talk, images, and discursive events serve as implicit and explicit forms of persuasion, and is used to influence audience perception of public issues, concerns, and outcomes (Althaus & Kim, 2006; Campbell, 2002; Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 2000).

Power and Framing in Public Policy Formation

In this mutually reinforcing match-up, the social actors with the most power typically command more attention and are accorded greater credibility by the journalists and editors who both contribute to and mediate the public sphere (Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Borah, 2011; Briggs, 2012; Campbell, 2002; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine,

1992; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992). As such, the issue frames used by the elite tend to generate more news coverage than the frames provided by those with less social standing and cultural capital (Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine, 1992; Fishman, 1980; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992). Within political discourse, frequency and repetition tend to make some issue frames more salient than others, factors that are reflected in the common strategy of shaping media discourse by "staying on message" (Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine, 1992; Fishman, 1980; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992). As Faircloth (1993) notes:

> Another important insight that can be gained from CDA studies is that language is a very strong device in promoting certain ideologies, institutions, nationalistic self-glorification, positive self and negative other presentations, fallacious arguments, demolishing of minority languages, specifying religious and political taboos, political conflicts, suppression of minorities, distorting the realities, construction and imposition of ideologies, and the like. (p. 111)

As an exercise in power and manipulation, the process and act of framing is rarely neutral. The desire to frame an issue with media elites in order to influence news coverage, public opinion, and ultimately public policy and funding is a key strategy in politics and public relations (Brader et al., 2008; Chomsky, 1999a, 1999b; Wenden, 2005). As Wenden (2005) notes,

> Thus, discourse can also be the focus of politics, that is, the struggle for the power of representation and proponents of various views use a variety of strategies to ensure that their framing of the nature of a particular issue predominates (p. 91).

Oppressed and non-dominant individuals and groups rarely have such opportunities, yet public policy formation often hinges on which frame is viewed by the elite and the masses as constituting the root cause of a social ill, problem, or issue (Wenden, 2005). As de Vreese (2005)

notes, “The frame building process takes place in a continuous interaction between journalists and elites and social movements” (p. 52).

Data Collection and Analysis

In addition to providing the viewpoints and positions of a daily newspaper’s editors and featured cartoonists, graphic artists, and columnists, the editorial pages serve as a mediated public forum, where different ideas and opinions may be expressed and debated (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2001; Entman, 1993, 2007; Fine, 1992; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a). While used perhaps most often by the elite, the editorial pages are, at least in theory, accessible to anyone who has the desire to express an opinion in writing and who has the capacity to convey those thoughts to the editor via mail, email, or the online comment function (Entman, 1993, 2007; Chomsky, 1999a, 1999b; Cohen, 2010; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2001; Fine, 1992; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a). For these reasons, editorials, columns, comments, and letters to the editor (referred to hereinafter as editorial-page items) about charter schools were selected as the plane of discourse for this study and individual editorial-page items serve as the unit of analysis (Entman, 1993, 2007; Chomsky, 1999a, 1999b; Cohen, 2010; Chong & Druckman, 2007; De Vreese, 2005; Druckman, 2001; Fine, 1992; Fleishman, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Hallahan, 1999; Neuman, 1992; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a; Wenden, 2005).

To collect the data sample, an online search of North Carolina newspapers was conducted using a key word search for “charter schools” and “editorials” with LexisNexis Academic. To provide historical as well as current context, the search parameters were set from September 1, 1995—about one year prior to the opening of the first charter school in North Carolina and when the literature review and a preliminary Internet search using Google news indicated the first

articles and editorial-page items started appearing in the state's news outlets—to September 1, 2014. The September 1, 2014 date was chosen in order to allow the researcher to investigate the impact lifting the charter school cap in 2010 may have had. Since the purpose of the study entails gaining insight into the charter school movement on a statewide basis, multiple searches were done using various newspaper archives and databases to ensure broad representation of various cities and regions within North Carolina. (See Appendix C for a complete list of newspapers included in the study sample.)

The resulting sample of 82 editorial-page items was then reviewed to remove any outliers, such as editorial mentions of North Carolina charter schools highlighted in newspapers published outside the state. No editorial-page items were removed due to content or the stance taken on charter schools, or traditional public schools. (News articles published by North Carolina newspapers that were captured by the search for editorial items were set aside for possible inclusion in that data sample.) This process left 44 editorial-page items representing three different newspapers, *The* (Wilmington) *Star-News, The* (Durham) *Herald-Sun,* and the *Chapel Hill-Herald.* To balance and broaden the sample to include North Carolina's three major urban centers: (a) Charlotte-Mecklenburg County; (b) Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill (The Triangle); and (c) Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem (The Triad)—a second online search with the same parameters was conducted using two additional news databases, NewsBank.com and EBSCOhost.com.

These searches yielded 142 editorial-page items for the Greensboro *News & Record*, 397 editorial-page items for *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, 375 editorial-page items for *The Charlotte-Observer*, 25 news items for the *High Point Enterp*rise and 15 editorial-page items from several smaller newspapers, including *The Waynesville Mountaineer, Winston-Salem*

Journal, The Sanford Herald, Jacksonville Daily News, The (Lumberton*) Robesonian*, and *The* (Kinston) *Free Press* (see Appendix C for complete list).

Given the large volume of editorial-page items rendered through the search, a random sampling technique was used to select a proportional number of editorial-page items for review. This resulted in the selection of 14 items from the Greensboro *News & Record*, 22 items from the Raleigh *News & Observer*, and 21 items from *The Charlotte-Observer*. The 15 items from the smaller newspaper sample were then compared with those produced by the other searches. Two duplications were removed, yielding 13 new items. This process yielded a total of 114 editorial-page items for analysis out of an original pool of 1,011 editorial page items about charter schools, 973 of which were published by North Carolina newspapers during the time frame specified.

Lastly, to provide additional historical context to the editorial-page items, a fourth search using LexisNexis Academic was conducted with the same parameters to identify North Carolina newspaper articles written about charter schools. This search yielded 2,091 news articles, which were downloaded into a database. News articles on charter schools that were not published by a North Carolina newspaper were removed from the sample, which reduced the pool of available articles to 766. To provide a more manageable data set for review, every twentieth article in the online database was then selected without regard to content for downloading and printing. Combined with news articles published by North Carolina newspapers that were collected during the earlier searches, from which a random sample also was selected without regard to content, this process yielded 60 news articles for review. No news articles were removed due to content or the stance taken on either charter schools or traditional public schools. In summary, the final data set was comprised of 114 editorial-page items and 60 news articles about charter schools that encompass a wide range of communities and regions in North Carolina.

To assist in the close reading of the texts selected for study, a CDA Coding Scheme (Appendix A) was developed based on the work of prominent CDA scholars including Jager and Maier as cited in Wodak and Meyer (2009, pp. 55–56), Reisigl and Wodak as cited in Wodak and Meyer (2009, pp. 112-113), and a similar study by Wenden that analyzed news reports on a different topic from a critical perspective (2005). Editorial-page items and news articles eliminated from the final data set were used to test and refine the coding scheme (Borah, 2011; Briggs, 2012; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Cohen, 2010; DeVreese, 2005; de Wet, 2001; Dunegan, 1993; Dunmire, 2012). The entire data set of 114 editorial-page items and 60 news articles were reviewed using the CDA Coding Scheme by the primary researcher.

To aid in reading against the grain, as Janks (1997) advises, a peer reader was engaged on a volunteer basis. A former classroom teacher who focuses on instructional leadership in his research, the peer reader has a doctorate in educational leadership, and has served as a principal of multiple elementary and middle schools in urban and suburban areas in more than one state. Although interested in learning more about charter schools, the peer reader did not have any preconceived notions about charter school efficacy, and did not know much about the rules and regulations governing this growing sector in public education.

The peer reader used the same coding scheme as the primary researcher to analyze a smaller, random sample of editorial-page items and news articles in the final data sets (DeVreese, 2005; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1988, 1993a, 2011). To ensure inter-coder reliability, the research, definitions, and rationales embedded in the tools were discussed prior to the analyzing the final data set. Any differences in coding between the lead researcher and peer reader were discussed and resolved, and helped inform the final analysis.

In addition to identifying technical matters, such as the name of the editorial page item or news article, author, and page number and/or word count (online archives and databases for

newspapers vary in terms of the data provided), the coding scheme was designed to determine the tone (positive, negative, or neutral) of the news reports and editorial-page items, as well as to elicit the major discourse strands, topics, and theme(s) (Jager & Maier, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 55-56; Reisigl & Wodak, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 112-113;Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1993a). Specific content and ideological statements were identified by asking a series of questions, which ranged from "What concept of K-12 public education does the article presuppose and convey?" and "Which actors/concepts are given greater prominence/lesser prominence" to "What/who appears to be missing or excluded from the article?" Social actors named and excluded (implicitly or explicitly) were identified, along with their perspective, dominance, credentials, and specific utterances (Jager & Maier, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 55-56; Reisigl & Wodak, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 112-113; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1993a).

The coding scheme also sought to identify the stance of each author, how ideology was justified and legitimized, overarching themes, key words and phrases, messages, questions that remained unasked or unanswered, and any other peculiarities noted by the researcher(s) (Jager & Maier, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 55-56; Reisigl & Wodak, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 112-113; Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 1993a). Once the coding scheme had been used by the researcher to analyze each of the 114 editorial-page items and 38 news articles, the major themes or frames in the text were then color-coded, along with seminal descriptions and definitions, adjectives, and other key words (see Appendix B: Color Coding Scheme for Frame Analysis). The peer reader also followed this process, using a smaller data sample as previously indicated. Lastly, given the overlapping nature of the discursive strands, and the limited presence of the pro-public school frames, the initial nine frames identified as part of this process were collapsed by the researcher and peer reader for the final analysis.

Situation of the Researcher

As chief of staff for a large, county-wide school district embroiled in the charter school debate, I believe that North Carolina is undergoing a critical epoch of history, one that future scholars will likely view with alarm due to the rapid retrenchment of hard-won progress in educational access, equity, integration, and social justice (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, 2006a, 2007; Bifulco et al., 2009; Buras, 2011; Buras & Apple, 2006). As a non-traditional educational leader, longtime public relations practitioner, Title IX scholarship recipient (swimming) that some might consider affirmative action, and beneficiary of white and middle class privilege, I represent an odd, unlikely, and some might say, implausible researcher for conducting a critical discourse analysis. In many ways, I represent the very bureaucracy that many reformers view (mistakenly, in my opinion) as the root cause of most public education ills, particularly those afflicting urban education.

I acknowledge those criticisms, and combat my own biases by actively seeking out research and dialogue with those of opposing points of view to expand my understanding of the issues and challenges that confront charter schools and urban education today. I also think it's significant that I work for the first African-American and first non-traditional superintendent in my school system's history, and am one of the few female chief of staffs in North Carolina, and nationally. For these reasons, I tend to identify more with Bourdieu's notion of the "left hand of the state" (Bourdieu, 1998) than the more typical depiction of central office administrators as the conservators of the status quo. Changing organizational culture and confronting structural racism represent deep and difficult work. Recent public policy shifts, massive budget cuts, and increasing poverty in North Carolina are making this difficult work even more challenging.

Like all researchers, I am more than the sum of my professional experiences, and draw on multiple perspectives and experiences as I approach this study and other scholarly work. A

second-generation advocate for people with disabilities, I am both the sister and mother of adults with significant intellectual disabilities, and was active in the civil rights movement for people with disabilities in St. Louis and Missouri before relocating to North Carolina. While in St. Louis, I was both condemned and applauded for my advocacy for inclusive education. At one point, I was threatened with a lawsuit by a special education attorney attempting to block the region's move toward inclusive practices as well as an ill-fated attempt by a very angry special education director at a member district to have me fired from the educational cooperative where I worked in communications and staff development planning. I was warned repeatedly that my disability rights advocacy was hurting my husband's career as a school administrator, even though he was employed by a different entity, a local school district.

Around 1991, my daughter, Erin, became the first child with significant intellectual, physical, and emotional disabilities taught in an inclusive setting in a neighborhood school in the diverse school district in which we lived. Shortly thereafter I started an educational conference for educators and parents on valuing diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusive education that drew more than 700 attendees from throughout the Midwest. This conference also offered the first sessions in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area on suicide prevention and school supports for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. In 1994, the Alliance for Inclusive Education and the Governor's Council on Disability named me Educator of The Year. What seemed radical then is considered best practice now—something I tried to keep in mind as I was conducting the research for this study.

Because of these and other formative experiences, I have chosen to focus my professional career in the public school sector and in urban school systems. Despite its faults and contradictions, I passionately believe in the transformative power of public education, for individuals, groups, and society as a whole. Like Winston Churchill, I tend to view democracy—

and democratically run public schools with locally elected boards of education—as the worst form of government and schooling, except for every other variety. A progressive by nature and inclination, a Democrat by political persuasion, and a former private sector marketer with Fortune 100 and 500 clients, I do not believe that a for-profit, privatized approach to public education will likely ever embrace the importance of educating students with significant disabilities, of welcoming the children of unauthorized immigrants, of lifting up multiple cultures as equals, or of locating schools in the most economically distressed neighborhoods—yet, that is what public schools do every day.

Children with challenges are more expensive and more difficult to educate, making the likely return-on-investment much lower for profit-making ventures. This, to me, is the bottom line that simply is not addressed adequately or forthrightly by the current free-market approaches to public schooling. Charters, private, and parochial schools choose their students; public schools do not. Even the most fairly run enrollment lotteries don't ensure equitable access, whether those lotteries are for magnet schools, specialized programs, vouchers, or charter schools (Buras, 2011; Buras & Apple, 2006; Estes, 2004). Until the underlying rationale addresses this fundamental difference, shifting public policy away from supporting public schooling for all in one unified system and dividing scarce resources among multiple players with varying levels of access and public accountability will likely remain problematic.

Limitations

In addition to the situation of the researcher explicated above, the study results are not considered representative of the large sample pool as is the case with quantitative and more traditional approaches to media content analysis. This study also is not meant to serve as an in-depth textual analysis in the linguistic tradition. Rather, the study is designed to elicit what Jager and Meyer (2009, p. 36) refer to as the "power effects of discourse," the combined weight of

individual texts, particularly the recurring themes, ideas, stories, and examples that contribute to the "sustained effects" that begin to constitute the shared knowledge and sense of naturalization that lead members of a society to accept the present circumstances and power relationships as normal and inevitable.

The combined weight of the various texts is then reviewed to see what the themes and patterns of representation tell us about how and why the charter school movement has moved from an outlier in public education in North Carolina to a mainstream school reform strategy in a relatively short period of time. The connections and intersections between communications strategy and execution, public opinion, the media, and public policy formation in public education represent hotly contested terrain in educational leadership. This is a significant and growing area of professional practice for school and district administrators and merits further research. As sweeping demographic changes in the United States result in fewer households with school-aged children, understanding these connections and intersections will only increase in importance for educational leaders tasked with maintaining public support for public schooling, regardless of the format the new distribution system takes.

Lastly, while significant efforts have been made to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, and to view the data from multiple perspectives, CDA is by nature, subjective. CDA digs beneath the explicit to delve into the implicit. Thus, while I believe this study will contribute valuable insight to researchers and practitioners, the findings presented here will benefit from further scrutiny. Limitations of funding and position also have constrained the study and the results. Ideally, the findings would be tested against in-depth interviews with past and current participants in the charter school movement as well as with opponents. It also would be interesting to conduct a quantitative media content analysis of the same data sample, and then compare results. These additional steps would provide a more complete picture. It is my

hope, however, that this study provides a framework that others may use in the future to tease out and analyze more fully the concepts identified in this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

> I'm haunted by this mental picture of four black students sitting down at a lunch counter in Greensboro [in 1960] demanding to be served. And now in 2011, four students sit down at a lunch counter where they are welcome, and they can't read the menu.
>
> —Howard Fuller, Civil Rights Activist and Co-Founder, Black Alliance for Educational Options

To help elucidate how the charter school movement has gained more social, economic, and cultural power in North Carolina, this study focuses on editorial-page items published by 20 different newspapers across the state from 1995 to 2014, a seminal time period in the evolution of the charter school movement. Using a CDA coding scheme (Appendix A), this study deconstructs the discourse of 114 editorial-page items and 60 news articles (Jager & Maier, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 55-56; Reisigl & Wodak, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 112-113; Wenden, 2005).

Step One: Analyzing the Text's Surface

Laying the foundation for the deeper thematic and framing analysis that comprises the second step and core focus of this study, the CDA coding scheme was used to identify what critical theorists refer to as the text's surface, which includes technical information (such as page or section number) as well as explicitly stated content (Jager & Maier, 2009). These elements comprise the basis of many quantitative and qualitative media content analyses, and include the tone (positive, neutral, or negative) of the editorial or article toward charter schools, the authors and authors' position, or role in the debates (when available), gender, race (when mentioned, or otherwise accessible), the date and location of the texts, the publication name, geographic location within North Carolina, length, and other contextual details (Mcnamara, 2005).

The CDA coding scheme also was used to identify the primary themes regarding charter schools that were expressed in the texts. After coding and analyzing the texts using the CDA coding scheme (Appendix A), nine major themes emerged from the data as the primary justifications for and against the creation and expansion of charter schools. These themes ranged from variations on parent and public school choice and freedom from bureaucracy to concerns about failing public schools and the desire to improve school outcomes by interjecting market-based competition. (See Appendix B for a complete list.)

Step Two: Framing and Critical Analysis

The themes that emerged from this process were then used to develop a second coding scheme for a deeper framing analysis of the texts (Appendix B). Frames are defined here as the overarching concepts used by journalists, elected officials, and other social actors to package, compact, and simplify news and information for public consumption (Entman, 1993, 2007; Goffman, 1974; Hogan, 2013; Scheufele, 2000). Frames act as rhetorical shorthand by providing a quick synopsis of key ideas in the same way that a picture frame contains and focuses a photograph, or piece of art. By moving forward some information and ideas at the expense of others, framing can also serve as a form of persuasion, particularly in political discourse (Borah, 2011; Entman, 1993, 2007; Goffman, 1974; Hogan, 2013; Matthes, 2009; McQuail, 1994, 2010; Scheufele, 2000; Wenden, 2005). In this manner, the larger narrative frames may encompass several inter-related themes (Scheufele, 2000; Wenden, 2005).

Through this two-step process, the intersection of race, class, and power in the evolution of charter school policy emerges, providing insight into how this highly contested school reform movement became embedded as a permanent fixture in North Carolina's public school landscape.

Step One: Analyzing the Surface of the Texts

Enthusiastic Editorial Support

From the first mentions of charter schools in early 1995 in the data sample, a close reading of the texts revealed that charter schools benefited from favorable and often enthusiastic editorial page support from most North Carolina newspapers, with *The* (Wilmington) *Star-News* serving as the primary and most frequent exception. In fact, of the 114 editorial-page items reviewed, 69 were coded (see Appendix A for CDA coding instrument) by the researcher as favorable to charter schools, seven were coded as neutral, and 36 were coded as negative (including 12 editorial-page items published by *The* (Wilmington) *Star-News*. Within the smaller data set of 60 news articles, 40 items were coded by the researcher as favorable to charter schools, six were neutral or balanced, and 14 were coded as negative.

Even the definition of charter schools used most often in the media texts analyzed is somewhat promotional rather than neutral in nature. A letter to the editor written by a former middle school teacher and published by *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer,* for example, defined charter schools as "public schools, funded by taxpayers" that are:

> . . . allowed to operate free of the many rules that apply to regular public elementary and secondary institutions in the name of seeking new ways of teaching and learning that can eventually be used in all schools (*The News & Observer*, 2010)

Throughout the data sample, North Carolina's charter schools were most frequently described as "public schools allowed to operate with fewer rules," a definition also offered by the Associated Press in a wire story (Velasquez, 2014).

Editors and other writers embraced the concept with enthusiasm, and continued to serve as avid supporters of charter schools for the ensuring decade or more. Similarly, charter school advocates used all four of the primary frames explicated in this study to justify and legitimize

charter school creation and expansion, even when data supporting those frames was lacking or legitimately called into question. It was not until the cap was lifted in 2011 and the North Carolina State Board of Education approved dozens of new charter schools each year that longstanding concerns regarding resegregation, equity, accountability, and transparency began to move from alternative news sites to North Carolina's daily newspapers. Clearly, charter schools benefited greatly from the enthusiastic embrace of the state's news and editorial pages, garnering overwhelmingly positive coverage in a mainstream media love affair that only recently showed any signs of abating.

Step Two: Framing Analysis

Four Overarching Frames Define Ideological Movement

Freedom from bureaucracy, public school choice, equity, and greater accountability emerged from a close reading of the texts and the two-step process outlined above as the four overarching frames used most frequently by editorial page writers and contributors to justify the creation and expansion of charter schools in North Carolina. In keeping with the overwhelmingly positive press received by charter schools from 1995 to 2014, three of the four frames position charter schools in a positive light as well, particularly during the movement's first decade, from 1995 to around 2006, when many editorial page writers and contributors were most actively promoting the adoption of charter schools and advocating for the movement's expansion in North Carolina. While the positive framing ebbed slightly as the number of charter schools grew, especially after the cap was lifted in 2011, the frames remained remarkably consistent from 1995 to 2014, an astonishing fact given the almost 20-year time span studied, the number of different newspapers included in the sample selection, and the number of political and social actors engaged in the debate. In the following section, the four frames are defined and outlined briefly,

followed by a more detailed and critical explication of the social actors, perspectives, and ideologies underlying these frames.

Four Frames Briefly Defined

The Freedom Frame

The first frame, the **freedom frame,** represents freedom from bureaucracy and bureaucrats, freedom from rules and regulations, freedom to teach, and the freedom to experiment, create, and innovate. This frame also implies freedom from the problems editorial page writers typically associated with public schools, including educational failure, discipline issues, urban blight, union control, and poor parental involvement. Freedom from the failed social policies of forced integration and busing are implied in this frame, along with the freedom of parents to choose a public school not constrained by local housing values and tax revenues—a theme that overlaps with the choice frame outlined below. The freedom frame also extols the virtue of free-market competition as a neutral arbiter of success, and as a powerful incentive for public school improvement.

Public School Choice

The second frame, **public school choice,** emerged early in the data and quickly eclipsed the freedom frame as the most salient rationale for the creation and expansion of charter schools in North Carolina. Defined most commonly as the right of parents to choose the form of schooling that best meets their families' needs, the choice theme also embraces choice as a social-justice and civil rights issue requiring government intervention, particularly for the poor, whose school choices are traditionally limited by geography and housing options. Ironically, given the frequent call for increased public funding and policy assistance, like the freedom frame the choice frame language also exudes the neoliberal/neoconservative idea of public education as a

consumer product that must compete in the marketplace for students, parental, and societal support without government interference and regulation.

The Equity Frame

The third frame, **equity,** represents the most contested terrain in the North Carolina editorial-page items and news accounts that comprise the focus of this study. For charter school advocates, charter schools serve as a critical and unique role as publicly funded escape hatches from crumbling and dysfunctional public schools, particularly for the poor and children of color. Thus, the creation and expansion of charter schools, particularly in underserved urban and rural areas, are seen as a social-justice and civil rights issue—on par with the nation's historic battles on school desegregation (Ellis, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Setser, 2014). While the state's charter school critics question this premise in light of well-documented patterns of hyper-segregation by race, class, and ability/disability in North Carolina, the equity frame remains a salient and positive one in the data sample.

The Accountability Frame

Growing concerns regarding equity and its corollary of hyper-segregation led to the fourth and final frame seen in the data set—the **accountability frame**. Similar to the evolving issues identified in other states via this study's literature review, this frame shifted from early attempts to position charter schools as more accountable to parents and the public, followed by complacency with the minimal measures contained in the enabling legislation and then gradually, to more insistent and frequent calls for more government oversight for charter schools, particularly those operated by for-profit and privately held corporations.

Initially seen as a positive frame or rationale for charter schools, this frame eventually resonated most clearly in the data set as a major and acknowledged criticism of charter schools—even among some charter school advocates and operators, who began to caution legislators and

the public about the sector's unfettered growth and uneven quality, while continuing to demand more equitable funding from state and local tax coffers. Thus, related issues of monitoring, oversight, and transparency in regard to charter schools are also included in this frame.

Viewing the Four Frames with a Critical Lens

In the following section, the texts are analyzed from a critical perspective in light of the four frames outlined briefly above. Drawing on the CDA coding scheme and the framing analysis, this section seeks to identify the participants, justifications, and ideologies underlying this ongoing struggle over meaning in North Carolina, and seeks to understand how certain assumptions about charter schools and public schools and the students they serve became normalized and accepted, regardless whether a more factual reading of these assertions would question their accuracy and veracity (Wenden, 2005).

The Freedom Frame

The desire to escape the oppressive centralized bureaucracies of the traditional public school system is embodied in the **freedom frame**, which also seeks greater educational control by principals, teachers, and parents at each school site. The Greensboro *News & Record,* for example, signed on early in support of charter schools, calling the concept an "idea worth trying" while urging "advocates to come forward with ideas" in an editorial published on June 27, 1996:

> Many people fervently believe that North Carolina's children would get a better education if parents and teachers had more say over what is taught and how money is spent in their schools. The impact of local control has been thoroughly debated. Now it's time to test this theory. (*News & Record*, 1996, lines 2-4)

What the Greensboro *News & Record* editors referred to in the excerpt above as parents and teachers having "more say" and greater "control" was similarly referred to by other editors and letter writers as freedom—freedom from bureaucracy and bureaucrats, freedom from state rules and regulations, freedom to innovate, freedom to teach and lead, and freedom to create new

solutions to longstanding public school challenges. As indicated by the editorial-page items and news articles reviewed, enthusiasm was high across the political spectrum regarding North Carolina's embrace of charter schools.

The following excerpt from an editorial titled "Charter school idea is worth trying" that was published in the Greensboro *News & Record*, is fairly representative of how the themes of innovation, choice, local control, and freedom from bureaucracy interconnect in the freedom frame. In this example, the editors have taken a cheerleading role, urging local citizens to respond to the new charter school opportunity created by the state legislature:

> The first charter schools could be greeting children in the fall of 1997. But state lawmakers' wisdom in opening this door will be meaningless unless those who have supported the idea can deliver on their promises of innovation. (*News & Record,* 1996, lines 23-25)

Freedom Should Spur Greater Innovation

The idea that once freed from bureaucracy, educators would create more innovative—and effective—schools was again sounded by the Greensboro *News & Record* on September 18, 1996, in an editorial titled, "Charter school option presents a daunting face: inventing a school is not simple." Here is an excerpt:

> Still, the problems of our schools cry out for creativity and individualism beyond what's possible in the confines of a regimented system. In that respect, the charter-school movement has much to recommend it. The object is to make room for innovation without encouraging schools to cope with their own educational needs by turning their backs on everyone else. (*News & Record, 1996a*, lines 26-28)

The association of charter schools with greater educator freedom, control, and innovation continued in news articles and editorial-page items from the state's first flirtation with charter schools in 1997 through the charter school movement's maturation and push for expansion during the next decade.

An opinion piece written by an official associated with the charter school movement published in *The (Durham) Herald Sun* on May 20, 2009, exemplifies the freedom frame:

> Most states have recognized there is a critical need to try new and innovative approaches to improving student achievement in our public schools. Public charter schools give parents choices within the public school system. They have the flexibility to try innovative ways of improving learning with the goal of sharing what works with the broader public school system. (Raburn, 2009)

The dual concepts of the freedom to innovate and create new options for those "who believe the status quo isn't good enough" also are reflected in the following excerpt from a guest column written by a founding board member of a proposed virtual charter school for *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*:

> One size does not fit all. This is a key principle in American K-12 public education reform and why charter schools—with their innovative approach to decision-making, scheduling, staffing, curriculum and filling in the gaps of traditional education—have grown so quickly around the country. (Setser, 2014, lines 11-13)

This libertarian yearning for freedom—from bureaucracy, bureaucrats, rules, regulations, excessive taxation, busing, integration, and other forms of government interference and imposition—persisted from 1996 through 2014. A 1997 opinion piece written by a middle school teacher and local teacher association affiliate and published in *The* (Wilmington) *Morning Star* (which became the Wilmington *Star-News* in 2003) captures this view well, along with a growing concern about the privatization and marketization of public education:

> The potential of public schools across the state is being stifled by power-controlling centralized administrators and politically active school board members, who often seem to have forgotten that they were elected by the public to advocate for public schools, not solicit privatization of public schools to be funded by public monies. (Yeates, 1997)

Freedom from Oppressive Bureaucracies

With charter schools, editorial writers maintained, educators would be freed from district control, bloated and inept bureaucrats and bureaucracies, and school board meddling (Buras & Apple, 2005; Tyack, 2003). A 2002 guest column in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer* reflects this frame, noting that:

> North Carolina's charter school experiment is supposed to be just that, an opportunity for educators to explore new ways of teaching without the rules and restraints of the traditional public school system. The state's newest charter school holds promise that it will fulfill that mission while serving a population that needs and warrants special attention. (Bryson, 2002, lines 3-6)

Frustration with the local school board is also evidenced in this letter written by a charter school board member and candidate for the (Guilford) Board of County Commissioners:

> From being involved as a board member at the Greensboro Charter Academy, a charter school in northwest Greensboro run by National Heritage Academies, I can tell you unequivocally, educating children is not at the top of the Guilford County school board's agenda—control is. (Hawkes, 2000, lines 7-9)

Similarly, a guest column by a charter school board member published more than a decade later in *The Charlotte Observer* captures the freedom frame and its inter- related themes well, stating:

> Because charters are generally single-campus entities with a board overseeing only that single school, the school leader is likely to enjoy greater empowerment and greater accountability than he or she might in a multi-school system. This structure will allow the gifted principal to flourish. A weaker school leader will lack the organizational support that a larger school system can provide. (Martin, 2014a, lines 21-25)

In the pro-charter school context, greater accountability is associated with market pressures and the assumption that principals will be more directly accountable to parents, who will choose better (or at least different) schools if they are dissatisfied with educator performance (Moe & Chubb, 2009). The thinly veiled barb implying that public school administrators are weaker and

more likely to need the "organizational support" of a "larger school system" also represents a fairly common rhetorical strategy throughout the data set, as is the overlapping use of multiple frames.

The following excerpt from a guest column written by an executive with a pro-charter advocacy group in North Carolina also exemplifies the freedom frame's emphasis on innovation as well as its central tenet that government rules and regulations constrain creativity in traditional public schools:

> Many states have recognized there is a critical need to try new and innovative approaches to improving student achievement in our public schools. Public charter schools give parents choice within the public school system. They have the flexibility to try innovative ways of improving learning with the goal of sharing what works with the broader public school system.
>
> Public charter schools are held to higher standards of accountability than traditional public schools. Not only are they accountable to the families that chose them, they're accountable to their authorizer, the State Board of Education, which can close the school if it doesn't meet fiscal and operational goals. (Raburn, 2009, paras. 9-10)

Similarly, a letter to the editor by a pro-charter school advocate published by *The Chapel Hill Herald* echoes the anti-bureaucrat, pro-educator stance embedded in the freedom frame:

> Ballantine (a candidate for governor) is a strong advocate for public schools. That is why he believes that we must take control of our education from the state bureaucrats and empower parents, teachers, and principals. He also believes that the artificial cap on charter schools should be lifted and that discrimination against home schoolers should end. (Newton, 2004, lines 3-5)

As shown by the excerpt quoted above, professional educators are not the only ones benefiting from the greater freedom associated with charter schools, however.

Charter Freedoms Extend to Parents

According to the freedom frame, parents are released from socioeconomic and housing constraints to choose their public schools, giving them more power to enact change (Moe &

Chubb, 2009; Tyack, 2003). “Too often our government education system mandates policies that suit its administrators but sideline families,” wrote a guest columnist associated with a conservative foundation in North Carolina in an editorial published by *The* (Durham) *Herald-Sun.* “. . . The willingness of Deputy Superintendent Carl Harris to incorporate parental concerns into district policy marks an encouraging and unfamiliar shift in an education paradigm that traditionally ignored the wishes of parents” (Kakadelis, 2005, lines 1-2 and 3-5). *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer* editorial page writers, while more cautious about the wisdom of expanding charter schools beyond the 100-school limit cap imposed by the state legislature, struck a similar note:

> Advocates of charter schools—funded by taxpayers but independently run by private boards—proclaim them to be a welcome educational choice for parents and students who want freedom to explore ideas that might not be easily addressed in regular public schools. They’re also seen as places where innovative approaches to education can flourish. (*News & Observer*, 2007, lines 2-6)

Along with educators and parents, taxpayers also would be freed through charter schools by paying less money for better schools, and businesses would be freed from the burden of having to retrain the ill-prepared workers produced by the failing public schools (Moe & Chubb, 2009). A guest editorial by a charter school advocate on the same day in *The Chapel Hill Herald* exemplifies these ideas, while adding the touch stones of “public school failure” and “miserable performance,” as well as rising costs and even student violence, noting that:

> In the United States, kindergarten through 12th-grade education is a government monopoly with all the faults and failings that implies. This is the underlying problem leading to skyrocketing costs, stagnant student achievement and violent alienation as in Littleton, Colo. (Morcombe, 2004, lines 24-26)

Similarly, a letter to the editor published on March 10, 2008 by *The* (Durham) *Herald Sun* vilified bureaucratic inertia, along with teacher unions, as the culprits blocking effective school reform in

the form of charter schools, vouchers, tuition tax credits, teacher and principal accountability, and teacher merit pay:

> The teachers' unions have an iron grip on state and federal legislators. Unions don't want solutions. They want to maintain a monopoly on education jobs, bloated bureaucracies, money and perks. And since politicians are beholden to those who put them in office, they are only too willing to acquiesce to the unions' demands. (Berendsen, 2008, lines 10-12)

Echoing Libertarian Themes

The anti-government rhetoric inherent in the freedom frame is exhibited in this opinion piece written by a North Carolina business owner and charter school operator that was published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, along with the free-market touchstone found in the choice frame:

> Our state budget is riddled with special interests, government interventions and seemingly good ideas that cannot be well executed by government. The free market can and will provide the solutions when left unfettered. The state must return to its traditional role, which includes ensuring public safety and a strong jurisprudence system. (Luddy, 2013, lines 45-48)

Similarly, a conservative columnist and pro-charter school advocate published regularly in *The Charlotte Observer* opined that:

> Contrary to appearances, there is no state law against innovation in government. Nor any regulation against creativity, any policy against trying something new, any court decision banning novel approaches to difficult questions.
>
> But in practice, it's hard to put new ways of doing things to work in government. Not impossible, mind you, but it can seem like it. (Betts, 2009, lines 2-7)

The libertarian viewpoint was expressed frequently by letter writers and other contributors to *The Charlotte Observer* editorial pages, which serve an area Britain's Lord Cornwallis once referred to as a "hornet's nest of rebellion" during the American Revolution (Cornwallis, 1780, as cited by

Mecklenburg Historical Association, 2015). Those with this viewpoint also frequently questioned one of the fundamental underpinnings of democracy—majority rule.

In response to an editorial page item regarding the burgeoning secession movement in Colorado—a topic that also has resonated with some public school parents seeking to break North Carolina's large, county-wide school districts into smaller units—Fields (2013) called for a more reasoned review of the secession movement, noting that ". . . rural Coloradans highlight one of the pressing concerns of our times: Does a majority have the right to impose its preferences on the minority?" (lines 5-7). Underscoring that this secession movement is driven by large, intrusive, out-of-touch state and federal governmental bodies that are not responsive to local concerns, Fields notes that "[these] little secession movements will likely spread as people seek some say-so in whether and how government addresses their needs and concerns" (2013, lines 8-13).

Privatizing Public Services

An underpinning of the freedom frame is the belief in free markets and the conservative view of the role of government as a broker of a more limited set of basic services rather than as the primary provider of wide array of robust public services (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997). Within the freedom frame, the quality, impact, and outcomes of public services are generally not viewed by editorial and news writers as significant as the ability to rein in costs, cut taxes, and end the unhealthy cycle of government dependency (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997). Making a profit, even at the expense of providing special education, transportation, free or reduced-priced meals, or English as a Second Language services to students, is seen as an acceptable and value-neutral proposition in which smart business practices are rewarded financially by the market while poor business practices are punished by resource constraints and school closures (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997). As a conservative,

pro-charter advocate in North Carolina states in this letter to the editor published by *The* (Durham) *Herald-Sun*:

> All of this strife invites the question: 'Why are educational choices so limited? Don't long waiting lists and fistfuls of applications signal that parents need more choices? And who really wants to entrust their child's educational future to a lottery?' (Kakadelis, 2005, para. 5)

Within the freedom frame, government services are inherently suspect as ineffective, slow, wasteful, and often corrupt, especially in comparison to private industry, which reflects the mythic toughness, rugged individuality, and Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest market mentality so admired in American history and business, if not in American public school science curriculums. The freedom frame also holds that current government spending levels are unsustainable and must be significantly constrained, especially in aging, post-modern welfare societies like the United States (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997). Thus, unregulated charter schools are seen as the more nimble and cost-effective alternative to expensive, tradition-bound, and highly regulated public schools. In this frame, public schools are generally seen as failing, and in need of replacement, despite decades of increased per-pupil spending (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997).

In this new model, public services like public education may be outsourced on a contractual basis to for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, or independently run public-private partnerships that do not require states to continually raise taxes, or make long-term investments in public employee compensation and benefits (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997; Tyack, 2003). Within this context, the free market represents the fairest, efficient, and equitable way to structure society by allowing those with talent, industry, and will to rise unhindered by government interference (Moe & Chubb, 2009; Smith & Pindus, 1997; Tyack, 2003). In a brief and conservative rewrite of North Carolina's history, a charter

school operator and frequent contributor to the editorial pages of various newspapers repeatedly uses privatization to extol the virtues of charter schools as outlined in this example published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*:

> Our state has been suffering with high unemployment and sluggish economic growth since the 2008 financial crisis primarily because of an inadequate education system, high taxes and poor investments by state government.
>
> It is instructive to remember that North Carolina, devastated in 1880 from the post Civil War era, emerged in 1900 as one of the strongest economies in the South after investments by individuals and farmers created the textile and furniture industries. (Luddy, 2013, lines 2-8)

The solution to the state's economic woes and educational issues, maintained the author—an outspoken charter school operator—was to unleash the free market on public education:

> . . . Offer school scholarships to promote choice and market-based education. Many education reforms will be discussed this year, but nothing would improve student achievement more than market-based education. About 50 percent of the state budget is spent on education. Family-based choice would save billions of dollars and dramatically improve educational opportunities. (Luddy, 2013, lines 23-26)

Parents Echo Freedom Frame's Emphasis on Competition

While business leaders, conservative pundits, and charter school operators were the most frequent authors of free-market editorial-page items, charter school parents who wrote letters to the editor and opinion pieces also sought to justify and legitimize charter schools as serving an important societal role by providing an incentive for public school change through the introduction of free-market competition. As an extensive study of North Carolinian attitudes toward public schools revealed, when parents feel caught between choosing what is best for their children and choosing what they perceive is best for society, they will always choose their children. However, the conflict in values inherent in such a situation creates anxiety and, ultimately, resentment (Reynolds Foundation, 2013). Given more equitable choices in public

schooling, most North Carolina parents would prefer to choose schools that benefit their children and families, but also benefit society and contribute to the public good (Reynolds Foundation, 2013). Here, a charter school parent demonstrates the salience of these issues:

> If you want to get rid of charter schools, get rid of poorly performing traditional public schools; the people will come running back. Until then, we need charter schools. Competition in education is an important tool in keeping all our schools healthy. (Estrada, 2014, lines 16–18)

Similarly, an editorial page contributor to *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer* quoted extensively from an interview with Joel Klein, former chancellor of the New York City school system, that was published in the *Wall Street Journal*—a fairly common rhetorical strategy in the data set in which a North Carolina author tries to ride on the proverbial coat tails of another, more authoritative and prestigious news source from outside the state. Sounding many of the same themes embedded in the freedom, choice, and equity frames, Shuford (2011) positions resistance to charter school expansion in North Carolina as "petulant" protectionism that is harmful to children and beneficial to unworthy government workers:

> On Feb. 19, Paul Gigot, editorial page editor of the Wall Street Journal, asked Klein what lessons he took from his years running the nation's largest schools system.
>
> Klein: "The resistance to change . . . is really the most important lesson." The status quo is "good for the bureaucrats, good for the unions, and it's good for the politicians . . . People who have monopolies and a guaranteed client base don't like competition."
>
> Charter schools are rattling that status quo: "The powers that be in K-12 education had this thing working just the way they liked it: more money each year, lower class sizes, more raises, lifetime job security, pensions for life, and why would you want to change that" (as cited in Shuford, 2011, lines 2–14)

The Choice Frame

Often coupled with the freedom frame, the choice frame emerged early in news and editorial-page items, and grew stronger and more emphatic as the charter school movement

picked up steam statewide. Choice via charter schools and choice via tuition vouchers and tax credits that could be used for private and parochial schools also overlap in the data, along with the related idea (also outlined in the freedom frame) that marketplace competition will force improvement in traditional public schools and the public school system. This early, 1996 example comes from a letter published by the Greensboro *News & Record*: "Parents of all income levels deserve the opportunity to choose the school that would best educate their children and the competition in the school marketplace would have the potential of improving all schools" (Davis, 1996, lines 10-11).

The pro-choice frame was evidenced by another 1996 opinion piece written by the *Waco* (Texas) *Tribune Herald*'s managing editor, whose pro-charter, pro-voucher, pro-choice arguments were reprinted in the Greensboro *News & Record*, which used its editorial pages to advocate for charter schools and choice proponents:

> Many Americans today react to calls for school choice as though any public funding of education other than to public school systems is a violation of constitutionally protected basic rights. That's wrong. We can do whatever we want with public education as long as we don't violate actual constitutional protections.
>
> School choice is a big issue now because practically all measurements show academic achievement in America's public schools slipping backward. Most Americans would send their children to private schools if they could afford the expense, according to several recent polls. (Nethway, 1996, lines 19-25)

An editorial writer for the Greensboro *News & Record* also indicated her support for charter schools and other choice mechanisms in an unusually lengthy opinion piece, noting that ". . . as a parent who pays to send my own children to school in Guilford County because I think it's a better fit for them as individuals than the school around the corner from our home in Rockingham County, I can guarantee that my vote (for state school superintendent) will be one that's affected by the school choice debate" (Brooks-Hodge, 1996, lines 62-64). Similarly, as noted in this 2002

editorial page item written by the dean of the University of North Carolina School of Law and published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*:

> A charter school is often the only education alternative for low-income children who are not succeeding in traditional schools, perhaps because they are inappropriately tracked into lower-tier classes and victimized by what George W. Bush called the 'soft bigotry of lowered expectations.' Or perhaps they live a community plagued with social problems and would be better served in a smaller educational environment. (Nichol, 2009, lines 1–5)

Choice Frame Eclipses Freedom Frame

Overtime, the choice frame began to eclipse the freedom frame as the core rationale for charter school expansion. With long waiting lists indicating the program's growing popularity among North Carolina parents, the cap on charter school growth became a target for many letter writers' ire. Editorials asking the legislature to lift the charter school cap accelerated after North Carolina's first bid to receive federal Race to the Top (economic stimulus) funding was unsuccessful, allegedly because the federal government viewed the state's enabling charter school legislation as overly restrictive, primarily due to the cap on growth (*Winston-Salem Journal*, 2009). As *The* (Jacksonville) *Daily News* editors proclaimed: "The General Assembly should remove the cap on charter schools because it's the right thing to do. Charter schools give parents more options in educating their kids and provide more flexibility in educating North Carolina's children" (*The Daily News*, 2010, lines 35-37). In another salient example, an editorial by *The Robesonian* in Lumberton, NC, extols charter schools' popularity with parents as evidence that choice was working as intended:

> If 20,000 moms and dads [number of NC families reported to be on charter school waiting lists] believe a charter school is their child's best option for a quality education, then that choice should be available. There is no better indicator of a life's course than the education that a person receives, and limiting school choices has always been contrary to this state's constitutional pledge to provide a quality education at the lowest cost possible. (*The Robesonian*, 2011, lines 5-9)

In the excerpt above, the writer attaches the choice frame to two, often competing ideologies. First, the state constitution's support of public education is modified to fit the fundamental neoliberal/neoconservative belief in the ability of markets to produce higher quality consumer goods at lower prices—themes also identified as belonging to the freedom frame. At the same time, the writer also borrows language more traditionally associated with the role of public schools in democratic society, positioning the ability to choose not only as a consumer good but as a constitutional, and, therefore, a civil right imbued with the power to shape the trajectory of an individual's life—a concept more typically aligned with the equity frame.

Untangling Discursive Knots

These overlapping thematic strands comprise what Wodak and Meyer (2009) refers to as "discursive knots," tangles of ideas that are woven together, sometimes in ways that seem contradictory in nature. Areas of entanglement can offer great learning opportunities if the overlapping ideas are teased out and analyzed individually and collectively. By adding layers of complexity and obfuscation, these entanglements also may legitimize concepts that appear on the surface to benefit the oppressed but actually accrue and consolidate more power to the elite (Jager & Maier, 2009; Faircloth, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Rather than serve as signals regarding potentially discriminatory policies and practices, a hallmark of critical discourse analysis, the complexities inherent in the discursive knots associated with charter school policies are distilled to a matter of parental control.

This strategy is deftly used by John Hood (2004), executive director of North Carolina's conservative John Locke Foundation and an ardent advocate for charter schools and frequent editorial page contributor in multiple newspapers across the state, as evidenced by this excerpt from the *Chapel Hill Herald*:

> Parental choice in education has attracted significant debate for decades. In an odd way, however, the parental part often gets lost. There are dueling philosophies of public education and dueling assertions about the value of competition and markets. But if advocates of choice are correct, the ultimate test of educational success or failure lies with the evaluation of parents who don't necessarily share the same goals, values, situations or respect for standardized tests. (lines 8-11)

Hood's basic premise that parental choice outweighs all other concerns and issues is reflected by a satisfied charter school parent in a letter to the editor published by *The* (Wilmington) *Star News*:

> . . . my family tried six different school systems in the past, from private to home schooling to public again without satisfaction.
>
> Charter Day School (in Leland) is the first school that provides the academic strength, solid discipline, and the values so important to our family.
>
> Charter schools are about choice. Families ought to have the right to choose a school that shares their same values and beliefs. (2004, Sullivan, lines 1-9)

A dearth of evidence proving the efficacy of choice theory did not prevent charter school advocates from insisting research supported their position, as this excerpt from a guest editorial published on December 7, 2005 in *The* (Durham) *Herald-Sun* indicates:

> Is choice really effective? An accumulating body of research indicates that it is. Choice not only benefits participants but also galvanizes traditional public schools into working harder. Choice introduces competition into the public school system, forcing traditional schools to compete for students, and ultimately elevating their performance. (Kakadelis, 2005, Dec. 7, lines 46-50)

Not surprisingly, in a consumer-driven economy such as the United States where notions of public sacrifice for the public good seems as quaint and outdated as blackboards, chalk, and apples for the teacher, the conflation of basic human and civil rights with the "right to choose" a publicly funded school resonates deeply with many charter school parents (Hastings et al., 2005; 2008; Hastings & Weinstein, 2007). This 2009 letter to the editor from a charter school parent published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer* illustrates this concept:

> No offense to him [a previous op-ed writer who questioned the efficacy of charter schools], but unless his child has been so bored in a public school that she begged not to be sent back, unless he has wasted months in vain for 'gifted academic differentiation' to begin, unless, for at least three years, he has begged his school board to transfer his child to a public school where she can learn to no avail—he really doesn't belong in any conversation about public schools. (Estrada, 2009, lines 4-7)

Noting the 100th birthday celebration in honor of Milton Friedman, a Chicago economist whose work helped fuel the rise of charter schools, vouchers, and market-based competition in public schooling, the editors of *The Sanford Herald* quoted former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice in a pro-charter school expansion editorial:

> Ms. Rice called upon the attendees (at the Educational Choice celebration) to promote the effort to give choice to children who don't have it. She said, "That is why school choice is indeed a matter of civil rights." (*The Sanford Herald*, 2012)

Similarly, Martin (2014) noted the following in a guest editorial published in *The Charlotte Observer,* along with the overlapping idea from the freedom frame that choice and competition will not hurt traditional public schools but rather improve them:

> Charter schools give parents choice. While choice, per se, does not make a school better, competition generally does. Faced with a loss of students that could lead to painful staff and facility reductions, the local educational authority redoubles its efforts to give each of its students the best possible education.

Cultural Conflicts Intensify

The growing disconnect and inevitable cultural conflicts between an aging, predominantly white and affluent public which pays for public schools and the students of color, poverty, and multiple nations who now attend them is evident in this letter to the editor published in *The Charlotte Observer*:

> Money won't make test scores rise; issue starts at home.
>
> Folks re quick to call for more money for better teachers to reverse the downward slide in student performance.
>
> What's lost in that discussion is the 50-plus year trend of Mecklenburg parents choosing private schools as a means to provide the challenging environment and accountability they covet.
>
> With Charlotte's prolific private school industry, including Christian, Catholic and charter schools, the performance results of the public schools are skewed by having too many students from under-performing home environments.
>
> No amount of dollars can offset what is lost for a child from an uncaring home with misplaced priorities. (Frazier, 2013, paras. 1-5)

Loaded with false and derogatory assumptions about public schools and public school students, the letter cited above looks at the transition in the student body in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, a majority minority-public school system in North Carolina, and assumes a series of correlations in a classic leap of bias that does little to illuminate the complex and systemic causes of poverty, the impact of poverty on student learning and achievement, and the stranglehold that race and class still have on opportunity in the United States. No amount of dollars can offset what is lost for a child from an uncaring home with misplaced priorities (hooks, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Frazier, 2013, paras. 1-5; Tyack, 2003).

Skillful, Strategic Use of Political Process, PR

Despite the unwavering belief in the power of free markets to right all wrongs (Moe & Chubb, 2009), charter school proponents who adopted the freedom and choice frames often were quick to call upon legislators to make policies and funding practices more favorable to charter schools, according to the significant and frequent number of their editorial page contributions. Charter school advocates also vigorously defended their positions when news articles, editorials, or letters to the editor questioned whether charter schools were having the desired impact in the state. It was not unusual to find several responses to any negative comment, or perceived attack

on charter schools when reviewing the data sample and the hundreds of news articles and editorial-page items that comprised the total pool from which the data set was drawn. By way of contrast, however, the frequent attacks on traditional public schools and public school leaders went largely unanswered.

Charter school advocates also were the most frequent contributors to editorial pages across the state, and were more likely to use more sophisticated, corporate-style public relations tools—such as PR Newswire press releases and carefully managed media events—than traditional public schools and school districts. The non-profit Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina (PEFNC), a pro-charter, pro-choice advocacy group cited often in news articles, for example, received $1.8 million in donations in 2013, according to IRS documents, and spent more than $1.6 million to:

> Educate [the] public concerning edu[cational] opportunities in NC to improve NC's K-12 education by informing and empowering parents, particularly low-income families, to choose the education they determine is best for their child(ren). (Parents for Educational Freedom in NC, 2013)

The organization's executive director, Darrell Allison, earned more than $167,085 in salary and related compensation (not including benefits); the non-profit organization's vice chairman, one of 10 board members, William Cobey, Jr., now serves as president of the North Carolina State Board of Education (PEFNC, 2013).

Revealing a deep understanding of the importance of grassroots constituencies and organization in political campaigns, charter school proponents were also highly skilled in staging public events, typically with parents and students in tow, designed to garner maximum media coverage and public sympathy (NCPEF, 2013; Wagner, 2013). PEFNC, for example, attracted large black audiences at venues across the state by sponsoring and advertising free concerts by legendary gospel music groups. The low price of admission was underwritten by sponsors who

interspersed the various performances with pro-public school choice speakers, who also distributed marketing materials. These events were then presented to the press and politicians as rallies for educational freedom (PEFNC, 2013, 2014; Wagner, 2013).

Proponents also engaged parents early and often in public policy debates, using websites and social media to encourage parents to sign petitions, contact legislators, share their stories, and make donations to the pro-charter, pro-choice cause. As a result, charter school parents were quoted and published nearly as often as charter school operators and owners in the data set examined as part of this study. The passionate call by many eloquent parents for more publicly financed school options may help explain why newspaper editors and elected officials were (and remain) so responsive to the movement. By way of contrast, parents of children enrolled in public schools were much less engaged in the charter school debate, as were public school officials. In retrospect, their silence spoke volumes, and may have led legislators to believe that most parents were dissatisfied with their public schools, given that is who they were hearing from most often in the press.

When studies of North Carolina charter schools showed lackluster results in terms of improving student test scores in 2007, for example, charter school advocates reacted quickly, placing the blame on everything from testing bias against black children to overly restrictive legislation and the charter school cap. Here is cogent example from *The Winston-Salem Journal*:

> North Carolina's law also stifles innovation. Administrative restrictions keep the schools from operating as true charter schools—that is, as public schools with good public financing and considerable freedom from the oppressive conventionalism of public-school regulation and administration. A national assessment of financing equity and operational independence showed last week that North Carolina's charter schools are among the nation's weakest. (*The Winston-Salem Journal*, 2009, lines 27-31)

While the data set revealed some response by editorial page editors to the study quoted above, public school officials and their professional associations, along with teacher unions, were

noticeably silent. The same held true when additional university studies of North Carolina charter schools revealed disturbing patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation, along with selective admissions policies (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Bilfulco et al., 2004, 2006, 2006a, 2007, 2009a, 2009).

The Equity Frame

Race, Class, and Resegregation

By co-opting the rhetoric, imagery, and psychological power of the civil rights movement in support of charter school creation and expansion, the **equity frame** represents hotly contested terrain in North Carolina, a seedbed for the national sit-in movement where the legacies of passionate participants in both the Underground Railroad and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) continue to haunt civic life and discourse (Christensen, 2008). Reaching across racial and political boundaries, in which conservative, white, and middle/upper class Republicans are most commonly associated with North Carolina's charter school movement, one of the most ardent advocates for charter schools, vouchers, and other public school alternatives in the state was an African-American Democrat. According to NC Representative Marcus Brandon (D-Guilford):

> I've been around my district knocking on doors in areas with 85, 95 percent poverty. If I can get some of those children out, even if it's with a system promoted by Republicans, I'm going to do it. (Huntsberry, 2013)

Similarly, as one proud alumni of the segregated East Arcadia High School reflected in an opinion piece published in the *Wilmington Morning Star*, the rhetoric supporting charter schools was eerily familiar to local black resistance to "forced busing" to white schools, where the promise of integration failed to exorcise the palpable pain and sense of loss associated with the destruction of once thriving black communities and schools:

> Some parents in Southeastern North Carolina are discussing the idea of charter schools—schools that operate separately from the general public school system. They want more responsibility for the education of their children. This idea is not new, especially to blacks in rural areas who for many years had little or no government support. (Keaton, 2000, lines 1-3)

As Keaton (2000) notes, when East Arcadia graduates gathered for a reunion and discussed their schooling, "Forgotten were the books that were never new and bore familiar names of whites in the county. Instead, we chose to recall our struggle and triumph in learning 'The Road Not Taken' without faltering" (lines 20-22).

The slow march of change as the Supreme Court's admonition in *Brown v. Board of Education* that schools desegregate with "all deliberate speed" stretched from 1954 to 1970 in Arcadia, NC, only fueled greater black resistance to relinquishing control of their schools, despite chronic underfunding and neglect under Jim Crow (Keaton, 2000). For Keaton (2000), the charter school movement's emphasis on local control and parent-driven accountability resonates, as does the belief that a segregated school freed from government interference is better than the hand-me downs and cast-offs from white citizens. As Keaton (2000) eloquently states,

> For a community that considered change to be what you got back from a dollar, a place where home-grown teachers were more accountable to parents than to the Board of Education, this was an end of an era—one that had begun at a time when blacks had no choice but to take control of their own destiny. That time has not passed. (lines 42-44)

North Carolina's painful history and all-too-current reality of segregated schooling, chronic underinvestment in public schooling, and low expectations for poor and minority students, informed the rhetoric of many editorial page editors and contributors, who worried that the budding charter school movement would further disenfranchise poor and minority children already struggling to gain a secure foothold in the state's public school system, despite hard-won progress during the desegregation era (Chafe, 1981).

Single Race Schools Spark Controversy

In a 1995 review of *Reading, Writing, and Race*, a book by David Douglas about the turbulent path to desegregated schools taken in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, an editorial in *The Charlotte Observer* (Williams, 1995, lines 52-56) presciently predicted that the degree of integration required to "satisfy the law and the community's commitment to fairness" and the question of whether "single race schools" are "ever acceptable" would continue to trouble the region, and would not be resolved by the expected authorization of charter schools in the future. As Williams (1995) noted with both insight and optimism:

> All-black, under-funded schools segregated by law clearly aren't (lawful or fair). But suppose the legislature authorizes creation of charter schools, and a corporation or foundation proposes an inner-city elementary school offering intense academic programs for disadvantaged youth, most of them black? The pathway to justice is not always clear. But, as Douglas' book shows, this community has always produced citizens capable of finding the way. He thinks it can do so today. So do I. (Williams, 1995, lines 52-57)

About a year after charter schools first opened their doors in North Carolina, *The* (Wilmington) *Star News* editors (1997a) decried the state's funding of racially segregated charter schools, which it called "segregation academies," noting that 23 of the state's 34 charter schools were predominantly black, and one was predominantly white, despite the enabling legislation's call for charter schools to reflect the racial diversity of their county's public school systems. As the editors stated,

> Black North Carolinians who support such schools say their children can't get a good education in integrated environments. Some white North Carolinians said that decades ago, and some still do. (Or say nothing, and send their children to predominantly white private schools.)
>
> The answer to both complaints is to improve our traditional public schools so that children of all colors and backgrounds get a fine education.

> The answer sure is not for the state—either out of misguided good intentions, political cowardice, cynicism or all of the above—to hand out public dollars for segregation academies.
>
> It's called separate but equal. And we tried it before. (lines 20-32)

Steve Ford, *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer's* editorial page editor, echoed similar sentiments more than a decade later as he reflected the growing concern that North Carolina's charter schools were becoming more hyper-segregated than the re-segregated traditional public schools, despite charters' popularity with parents:

> It's true that parents of some African-American youngsters like charter schools because they believe teachers and administrators in conventional schools have lower expectations, perhaps even prejudices, with regard to their children. Given the troubled history of the integration of public schools, those parents' feelings are understandable.
>
> However, going the way of some charters with huge racial imbalances is hardly a solution to that fear. (Ford, 2010, lines 21-26)

The paternalistic nature of white assumptions regarding parents of color, particularly African-Americans, also is on display in the excerpt cited above, even though Ford (2010) attempts to acknowledge the "fears" that some parents may have, given the "troubled history of the integration of public schools."

Diversity Concerns Dismissed

Most editorial page writers and contributors, however, dismissed diversity concerns, citing the state's requirement that charter enrollment must be open to all students and should reflect the demographics of their local communities, as measured by the student demographics of the local education agency in which the charters reside. That such blind faith was put in legislation without any sanctions or monitoring efforts put in place to ensure compliance is rather mind-boggling, yet this excerpt from a Greensboro *News & Record* editorial lauding charter schools in 1996 reflects a set of assumptions still in use today:

> Precautions are being taken to keep this from becoming a return to the 'white flight' Christian schools of the '70s. The North Carolina law goes so far as to require as to require that a charter school's racial makeup parallel that of the surrounding school system's by the end of the first year (*Greensboro News & Record, 1996a*, lines 10-14).

The fault lines left by centuries of slavery and decades of Jim Crow juxtaposed against ongoing white resistance to African-American gains in education, business, and civic life in the South (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Christensen, 2008; Wilkerson, 2010), however, make it impossible to separate the growing demand for charter schools and other public school alternatives from the contentious efforts of North Carolina school boards in Wake County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, and Guilford County in more recent decades to maintain some semblance of economic and racial diversity in their schools (Clotfelter et al., 2002, 2013; Christensen, 2008; Tyack, 2003; Wilkerson, 2010). As indicated in a 1997 editorial in the Greensboro *News & Record* titled "Sooner or Later Someone Must Decide—School Redistricting Can't Hope to Answer All Questions," these issues remained front and center in ongoing school board policy debates:

> The committee asked for the board's official position on "neighborhood/community schools versus 'racial balance.'" This is the central dilemma of redistricting, and school board members have voiced conflicting views of the subject. Unfortunately, it is a question to which there is no straight, simple answer. People want both neighborhood schools and integration. It all depends. (*News & Record*, 1997, lines 22-25)

Hidden Corollaries of Race and Class Fester

Clearly, even when the desire for stable neighborhood school assignments determined by housing price and location (as opposed to busing for integration) is discreetly coded and repackaged as the desire for more local control (freedom from school boards that force integration) and parental choice (the choice frame after losing the neighborhood school battles of the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s), or perhaps more naively, or cynically (depending on the writer's worldview), as a new civil and human right (the equity frame), the hidden corollaries of

racism and classism fester (Apple, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Bonastia, 2012a; Schwalbe, 2008). Thus, while some black elected officials and the black president of Parents for Educational Freedom (PEFNC) in North Carolina sees charter school access as an important civil rights issue, the head of the state NAACP and the leader of North Carolina's burgeoning Moral Monday movement, which stages weekly protests in Raleigh against the conservative-led government, see charter schools, vouchers, and tuition tax credits as inter-related parts in a systemic effort to defund the public schools that serve the vast majority of poor children of color.

That public schools also serve as economic ladders to the middle class for many black educators and professionals has not escaped the notice of critical race theorists who view the shift in resources as part of larger efforts to maintain white privilege and control not only of schooling, but of economic resources (Bonastia, 2012a; Boyum, 2009; Goodman, 2012). The fact that PEFNC and other pro-charter groups active in North Carolina are funded almost entirely by the white conservative donors, organizations, and foundations most closely aligned with the national charter and voucher movement does little to allay the mistrust (Smith, 2014).

Racially Coded Rhetoric

The racially coded rhetoric in the data sample is noted most often in letters to the editor, and is frequently tied to local school-board efforts to consider racial and socioeconomic balance in making student assignment and re-districting decisions, as well as programmatic decisions that appear to favor poor and minority students. To believe it is coincidental that these policy decisions were being debated at the same time the state decided to experiment with charter schools as an alternative to traditional public schools requires a naivety that is unsupported by the evidence (Apple, 2006; Bettie, 2003; Bonastia, 2012a; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; hooks, 2000; Schwalbe, 2008).

As one citizen wrote in a letter to the editor titled "Guilford schools need to reduce the overhead" published by the Greensboro *News & Record*, "Placing diversity above quality and parental involvement will only continue our downward spiral. Better educated students and more involved parents will solve more of our racial/ethnic conflicts and attitudes than forced attendance zones (Thomas, 1997, lines 24-26)." From the assumption that an emphasis on diversity precludes a commitment to quality to the implied notion that less engaged parents are to blame for the prevailing education woes and resulting cultural conflicts is a brief yet potent example of what Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006) calls color-blind racism, in which the deeply embedded psychological biases fostered in American society prompt automatic racist responses that are seen as non-prejudicial by whites.

Hints of Color-Blind Racism

According to Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006), the post-modern emergence of new forms of racial stratification has combined with distinctive linguistic strategies that seek to deny and diminish the ongoing and persistent impact of racial prejudice in the United States (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). A letter to the editor proffered by a teacher in a suburban school offers hints of color-blind racism, along with what could be perceived as racially coded rhetoric, especially when the comments are reviewed against the backdrop of affluent, predominantly white suburban schools experiencing more diverse students due to school-board insistence on maintaining integrated schools through rezoning efforts:

> Discipline is not a bad word. It starts in the home, where personal responsibility and accountability should be taught and reinforced. If the home does not value proper behavior, does not put a value on education, then what we do in the schools is futile.
>
> We need to stop allowing unruly students to prevent teachers from teaching and students from learning. Yes, I believe all students can learn, but also realize that some just don't want to.

> It's time to recognize the rights of the majority of students who either want to learn or would, given the proper environment and opportunity (Toth, 1995, lines 10-18).

This is not to say that the above letter writer is explicitly racist, but to recognize that the automatic response to concerns about discipline and safety in schools, especially the minority majority schools that are becoming the norm in urban centers in North Carolina, most often evokes the faces of children of color in many people's minds, and that such rhetoric often serves as code words for problems associated with integrated and racially diverse public schools (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000).

Who Will Educate "Problem Kids?"

In an editorial titled "Charter school option presents a daunting face: Inventing a school is not simple," the Greensboro *News & Record* echoed this teacher's view of "problem kids," worrying that with charter schools in play, these children might get confined to the "educational dustbin" of their local public schools, "which are required by law to do something with them" (*News & Record, 1996a*). Such rhetoric rings a number of alarm bells regarding race, class, and difference as well as a pervasive, anti-public school bias, especially when the editorial is seen against the historical backdrop of a recently (1993) merged school system with a dwindling tax base and a growing number of poor, minority, and immigrant children whose families are accused of living on welfare and not paying their fair share of taxes by some majority white parents and community members (Chafe, 1981; Couch, Shughart, & Williams, 1993; Wilson, 2000; Stewart, 1969; Sher & Schaller, 1986; Strang, 1987). "Problem," "struggling," "low-performing," "poor," "struggling," "special," and "challenging" are adjectives that often serve as code words for the dispossessed, particularly poor children of color, immigrants, and the disabled (Bettie, 2003; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Bonastia, 2012a; Bonilla-Silva, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; hooks, 2000).

Despite its endorsement of charter schools and its repeated urging of local groups to form "their own schools," the Greensboro *News & Record* acknowledged some concerns with discrimination, noting,

> While charter schools are prohibited from discriminating, there are a thousand ways to make children feel unwelcome. Many Americans are already unwilling to pay higher taxes to support public schools; are they willing to take on the burden of education for those who need special attention? (*News & Record, 1996a*, lines 23-25)

Sadly, the answer to the "other," as is so often the case, is to send him/her someplace else, away from here, to an isolated setting that is better suited to meet his/her needs (Apple, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Fiori et al., 2000; Hehir, 2010). Discipline and safety concerns also serve as code words for the presence of large numbers of poor and unruly children of color, as well as "disruptive" children with disabilities whose protections in federal law often meet with resentment and resistance (Apple, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Domke, 2001; Hehir, 2010; hooks, 2000). That such discrimination often masquerades as paternalism (isolating the other is better for everyone) has helped feed the pernicious lie, still alive today, that slavery was a kindness and form of Christian witness to the enslaved as North Carolina's history books indicated for generations (Moore, 1901; Bonilla-Silva, 2002, 2009).

Signs of Racial, Class Bias

The following excerpt from an editorial in *The Robesonian* in support of a proposed alternative charter school exhibits the very signs of the race and class bias, indicated above, that the writer purports to disavow:

> There has been talk for decades of creating an alternative school in this county, a place where incorrigible students—preferably from high schools—could be sent as their final chance to get an education. Their removal—as well as the discipline problems they cause—would enhance the learning atmosphere for the great majority of students who are sincere about gaining an education, but frustrated by daily disruptions that are beyond

> their control, and their teachers' inability to deal effectively with the offending students because of liability issues.
>
> The push for an alternative school in this county has never gained traction because of the straw man that it would become a dumping ground for black and American Indian students. But there are layers of protection against that happening—a school board, central office and principals and assistant principals who are mostly minority. (*The Robesonian,* 2011, lines 28-38)

The racial cues embedded in this passage will signal to its intended readers that most of the "incorrigible" students are indeed children of color, all while maintaining the color-blind posture that racial concerns are merely a "straw man" worthy of debunking.

The sad truths that males of color, particularly African-American males, are disproportionately represented in school suspension and disciplinary data, and that males of color are more likely to receive more significant disciplinary consequences in comparison to their white male counterparts for the same offense, are conveniently set aside as an irrelevant "straw man" unworthy of further consideration (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).That the hiring of black professionals is considered ample protection against racism in the final passage is akin to the classic "I'm not racist; I have black friends" statement, which immediately broadcasts the opposite to people of color (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006). As Bonilla-Silva has shown, being color-blind in a racially stratified society is a privilege only whites enjoy (2002a, 200b, 2006).

Questioning Underlying Assumptions

The editorial writer cited above also deploys the freedom frame, implying that "liability concerns" (government regulations and laws) are prohibiting (white, female) teachers from disciplining "incorrigible" (black/brown, male) students appropriately. As with all code words, for the in-group members, such rhetoric immediately conjures up a series of stereotypical images, from the pointy-headed government bureaucrats to the greedy lawyers and their clients who

conspire to keep ill-behaved children in public school classrooms to the assumptions about the perceived race and gender of the students and the teacher (Brader et al., 2008; Brendl et al., 1995; Brewer & Karmer, 1986; Buras, 2011; Buras & Apple, 2005).

Beneath the neoliberal and neoconservative rhetoric, however, lies a disturbing canker, one that distinguishes between the worthy and non-worthy other in order to justify and legitimize the resurgence of segregation. In this new milieu, students and their parents are not only free to choose and freed from bureaucracy, they are also freed from having to go to school with the unworthy, i.e. children of color, those who are poor, and children who are disruptive, academically struggling, or otherwise not wanted in charter schools. The children of uninvolved or disruptive parents also need not apply.

Legalized Segregation Expands

As Dorosin and Jones (2010) indicated in an guest editorial titled, "Charters' uneven racial makeup," published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, while the State Board of Education revoked 35 charters from 1997 to 2010, "no school has ever had its charter revoked for failing to comply" with the state's "integration policies" and there is "no evidence of the Charter School Advisory Committee ever finding a school outside the acceptable diversity range or investigating the variance" between the charter school population and that of the school district in which it is located (lines 26-28.) As Dorosin and Jones (2010) stated:

> Despite the language and intent of these diversity policies, more than 20 percent of North Carolina's charter schools have racial compositions that differ from those of their Local Education Agencies (LEAs) by 50 percent or more. In the Charlotte, Durham and Guilford LEAs, six charter schools have white student populations between 82 and 90 percent, while LEAS have between 24 and 42 percent white students. In Charlotte, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Iredell-Statesville, Lenoir, New Hanover, Wake and Wayne Counties, 13 charter schools have black student populations between 83 and 100 percent, while LEAs have between 15 and 49 percent black students. (Dorosin and Jones, 2010, lines 34-40).

The apparent lack of concern found in the data set among legislators, state board of education members, and other public officials regarding the lack of diversity in charter schools in a state with such a tortured history of racial bias and state-sanctioned human bondage and discrimination should be shocking, but is somehow expected. As North Carolina Representative Jerry Tillman responded when asked about students who could not go to charter schools because they are not required to provide transportation, free- or reduced-price lunches, and other services, "They can go to their public schools" (Schofield, 2013). Here's the quote in total:

> It's certainly okay if they don't go there [the charter school]. They can go to their public schools. They can get their free and reduced price lunch. And they can do that. But the charter school itself and the commission must decide what they can do and when they can do it financially. And that's where we are now and that's where we're gonna' be and I'm certainly for that. (Schofield, 2011, para. 4)

In other words, the children of the poor and others who need the services required of public schools need not apply.

The leading House Republican in the state, another leading proponent of charter school expansion, and the driving force behind the state's successful voucher legislation, has gone on record on the House floor opposing discrimination in charter school hiring and scolded the female state superintendent of schools to "stick to her knitting" when she voiced support for greater charter and private school oversight (Sturgis, 2013, paras. 1-2).

Competing Ideologies Characterize Discourse

The reaction from both sides was predictable. What some charter and choice advocates saw as appropriate support for conservative, Christian values and a logical extension of the free-market and a value-free effort to improve public schools (Tyack, 2003), critics saw as one more nail in the coffin of the state's commitment to integration, equity, and social justice in public schooling. As Lyerly (2013) wrote in a letter to the editor:

> State Rep. Paul Stam's Nov. 20 letter "More charters" is proof positive that the Republicans are out to undermine public education by diverting taxpayer money to charter schools. Charter schools increase segregation and divert resources from woefully underfunded traditional schools. Charter schools do not provide many of the services that traditional public schools do, thus leaving traditional schools with increasing expenses for children for whom charters are not a viable option—expenses for which the GOP refuses to pay while also engaging in a gratuitous was on our hardworking public school teachers. (lines 2-7)

Stam, who also led the successful legislative fight to lift the charter school cap, lessen state requirements for charter schools employees, and allow charter school employees and board members to have preferred entry into charter schools , also got in hot water for comparing homosexuality to a mental disorder like pedophilia, saying that voucher schools could legally exclude gay, lesbian, and transgendered students, and by advising the female state superintendent to "stick to her knitting" following her calls for greater accountability for private schools that receive public funding (Huntsberry, 2013; Papitch, 2014).

Early Voices of Dissent

While the equity frame was used to position charter schools as a positive influence on public education and social justice issues in North Carolina, some of the early voices of dissent presciently questioned this rationale. As 1997 letter to the editor published in the Wilmington *Morning Star* warned:

> Before we allow a for-profit business to siphon off those students most easily and cheaply educated and return the rest to our public schools with reduced funding, we should fully consider what this will mean both to those who are most vulnerable and to the majority who will become just one more commodity in our market-driven economy. (lines 22-24)

While most North Carolina reporters, editors, and editorial page contributors embraced charter schools enthusiastically when first proposed and adopted, a middle school teacher and officer in the local teacher association expressed concern, again in the Wilmington *Morning Star*:

> Greed is the driving force in privatization. The bottom line moves from educating children to corporate profit. Money saved in private management often is accomplished by eliminating special education and special-subject programs as well as their teachers, replacing veteran teachers with lower paid, inexperienced, sometimes non-certified 'facilitators,' increasing classroom size while omitting assistants, and substituting office, custodial and cafeteria personnel with temporary services for lower fees without benefits. (Yeates, 1997, lines 31-35)

Similarly, Dornan (1998), the executive director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, noted the following in an guest editorial published in *The* (Wilmington *)Star News*:

> In the legislature, and in the boardrooms and living rooms across the state, debate is raging over North Carolina's year-old experiment with charter schools (lines 1-2).
>
> . . . The idea behind charter schools is simple: free market competition. Without competition, the argument goes, schools operate as a monopoly and their 'customers'—students and parents—may not be well served.
>
> The desire for innovation, quality education and parental choice has sparked a remarkable response from one side of the country to the other. Are charter schools a miracle cure for education, or a wolf in sheep's clothing? (lines 9-16)

While Dornan's concerns were quickly dismissed by charter school advocates in comments and letters as a desire to maintain the status quo, his insights resonate more loudly and accurately in 2014. As Dornan wisely indicated, "One thing is certain: charter/choice decisions made today have the potential to profoundly change the face of education in North Carolina. Less certain is whether the changes will be for the better or worse." (1998, lines 54-55).

The Accountability Frame

Accountability Defined in Business Terms

In North Carolina, a state where public schools are tightly controlled, regulated, and funded at the state level, and where the extensive use of standardized testing to measure the effectiveness of increased investments in public schooling has a longstanding history, the monitoring, transparency, and accountability frame that emerged from the data is a significant

one. Not surprisingly, given the state's charter-friendly Board of Education and General Assembly, history of frugal government, and small charter school office, both sides of the charter school debate tend to weigh in frequently on this issue.

In the data sample, charter school advocates maintained that charters were more accountable to parents than their public school counterparts because dissatisfied parents could remove their children at any time, and the privately appointed school board only had one school to manage, rather than dozens. In addition, the threat of closure by the State Board of Education would foster greater accountability for overall school effectiveness, unlike traditional public schools that remained open no matter how low their test scores sank. Thus, like any business, charter schools would rise, or fail according to merit rather than government protectionism. As Martin (2014a) stated in an editorial published in *The Charlotte Observer*:

> Because charters are generally single-campus entities with a board overseeing only that single school, the school leader is likely to enjoy greater empowerment and greater accountability than he or she might in a multi-school system. This structure will allow the gifted principal to flourish. (Martin, 2014a, lines 21-24)

According to the pro-charter marketing, accountability, and transparency frame, any concerns about corporate welfare, or efforts to secure legislative supports and additional government funding streams were conveniently ignored (Apple, 2001, 2006; Buras & Apple, 2005; Katznelson, 2006; Moe & Chubb, 2009). When discussing accountability, charter school proponents also avoided discussing the impact turbulence in the charter school sector would have on the children whose schools faced closure, or on the public school systems that would, by law and expectation, re-enroll students who may be even further behind after months in a weak charter (Ladd, 2012).

Fiction of Greater Charter Accountability

Charter school proponents also maintained the fiction that the state accountability system, which was built on standardized tests, was sufficient to hold charter schools accountable for results, once again ignoring selective entrance, application, and parental involvement requirements and other policies designed to exclude certain groups of students, particularly those with low test scores, English language learners, and students with disabilities (Frankenberg et al., 2011). As a Wake County teacher of the year pointed out in a 2008 letter to the editor titled, "Statistical Snookery" that was published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, comparisons of an exclusive charter school with selective admissions criteria to a comprehensive public high school that served all children was misleading and unfair:

> In his recent Point of View column criticizing the certification and licensure requirements for North Carolina teachers, Robert Luebke of the John W. Pope Civitas Institute proved once again that conversations about public education are tinged with deceiving statistics slung by organizations with an agenda.
>
> . . . What Leubke failed to mention is that Raleigh Charter has a selective admissions process that requires all students entering ninth grade to be on grade level in mathematics—a policy that probably has a little something to do with its impressive passing rates on end of course tests, don you think?
>
> When will we ever get to the point in our community where statistical snookery is the exception rather than the norm? (Ferriter, 2008, lines 2-5 and 14-16).

Perhaps as a corollary the defense of charter schools as public schools "open to all" intensified as concerns about lackluster test scores and segregation by race, socioeconomic status, and ability/disability began to surface more regularly in news and editorial-page items. Interestingly, as apprehension about the role of for-profit companies in public school reform grew, charter schools sought to assure the public and distinguish themselves from their private school competitors, referring to themselves as "public charter schools" in editorial-page items and news articles.

One of the North Carolina charter school movement's staunchest allies, *The Robesonian*, had this to say in 2009:

> Make no mistake about it, charters are public schools. The State Board of Education charters them, and they must meet its standards. Employees are paid with public funds, and children do not pay tuition. They are neither private nor home schools. They are public schools, and some of them rank among the nation's finest. (*The Robesonian*, 2009, lines 13-16)

Demands for Greater Oversight

Yet, as charter schools multiplied across the state, and were no longer considered a new experiment in innovation, demands for greater oversight of the burgeoning sector also increased. In a typical response from a media that remained infatuated with charter schools despite spotty results, a 2008 editorial published by *The Fayetteville Observer* that appeared shortly after a North Carolina study indicated that student performance actually got worse when children enrolled in charter schools rather than better called for better oversight yet stopped short of urging an end to the program:

> Charter schools were supposed to rescue the worst public schools by emulating the best private ones. That's what President Bush said. His No Child Left Behind legislation even encourages states to pass off failing schools to private companies and non-profit organizations that run charter schools.
>
> The idea is that because charter schools operate outside of the rules, regulations and statutes that apply to public school districts, they are free to focus on students' performance instead of bureaucracy.
>
> Unfortunately, in North Carolina, the lack of oversight has created as many problems as it has solved. (lines 2-10)

Pressing for increased regulation, *The Fayetteville Observer* editorial insisted that "[at] a time when 32 percent of students are failing to earn a high school diploma, North Carolina schools need more regulation in classrooms, not less" (2008, lines 23-27).

Fracture in Charter Unity

Although all charter schools in North Carolina by law are operated by non-profit organizations with privately appointed school boards, fissures between charter schools whose day-to-day operations were managed locally and those managed by for-profit companies opened wider as the influx in charter school applications and approvals created more competition not only between public schools and charter schools, but between and among charter schools as well. As the board chairman of a locally run charter school in Charlotte that serves a large percentage of low-income students insisted in an opinion piece published in *The Charlotte Observer*:

> With careful oversight, accountability and limit in number, charters can be advantageous to communities. But that is not the motivation of many charter school proponents. Financial gain is a huge motivator, and charters are a ripe market for those wanting to line their pockets on the backs of our students. Hedge fund managers are investing in the charter movement to make money. (lines 9-12)

This break in the normally unified pro-charter ranks was rarely seen in the data set, especially during the first 10-15 years of charter school operation in the state. As the number of applications and approvals for new charter schools began to grow rapidly, and as the General Assembly adopted more free-market initiatives such private school tuition vouchers and special education tax credits, dissension grew. Suddenly, former partners in the North Carolina Public Charter Schools Association were accusing each other of ethical violations (Zachary, 2014).

As court documents shed light on the exorbitantly high fees and salaries being paid to one of the state's most prominent charter school operators and his array of perfectly legal but ethically questionable charter-management organizations and for-profit companies, more news and editorial page contributors began questioning these arrangements and calling for tighter state management and greater public disclosure. In a 2012 letter to the editor published by *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, for example, Eisenberg declared:

> I am opposed to privatizing all forms of services that governments have done effectively in the past such as prisons and for-profit charter schools. I, my wife and our children are products of the public schools and all of us have world-class educations.
>
> I would like to know what percent of the public tax dollars are going to support the private for-profit schools so I can deduct them from my state and federal taxes. I am totally for my tax dollars to be used for public schools, but not for profiteering at the expense of our children. I believe we can and must do better (lines 10-16).

Even former charter school cheerleaders started sounding alarm bells regarding the need for greater monitoring of charter school operations.

In a 2014 letter to the editor published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, Lee complained that:

> Charter schools were meant to be a source of innovation to be modeled in traditional public schools, not a competitor of traditional public schools. Their role in North Carolina is being perverted by the General Assembly into another free market model in the name of 'choice.' (lines 5-7)

Similarly, the board chairman of a Charlotte area charter school that managed to carve out a fleet of school buses from its budget argued that charter schools that do not transport students effectively shut the door on access, particularly for low-income students.

According to Martin (2014b, line 16), the high mobility rates of families who live in poverty, many of whom move every year, and sometimes multiple times each year, would derail student enrollment and stability in most charter schools. As Martin (2014b) stated in an editorial published in *The Charlotte Observer*:

> Thus, one might conclude, if a school wishes to serve a student body that includes a reasonable percentage of students from low-income families, it must provide transportation; or conversely, if a school does not provide transportation, it will not be able to serve a student body that includes a reasonable percentage of students from low-income families. (lines 31-34)

As a result of this phenomenon, Martin (2014b) suggested tying public funding for charter school operations to the provision of transportation for "most of the students who might choose to attend that school," while simultaneously increasing the flow of tax dollars to charter schools for this purpose, on par with the per-pupil transportation allocations allotted to traditional public school systems (lines 35-40).

Charter Concerns Increase, Coalesce

An editorial in *The* (Waynesville) *Mountaineer* expressed the same trepidations, particularly as the state legislature made tuition vouchers for private schools, special education tax credits, and tuition tax credits for private school part of its public school reform platform along with the expansion of charter schools:

> These pieces of legislation would further hurt the public system by segregating students into two groups: affluent and well-performing students will be sent to private or charter schools and poor and exceptional students will remain in the public schools. (2013, lines 37–39)

Similarly, a letter to the editor published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, urged caution about the rising tide of for-profit companies involved in the state's charter school sector:

> I hope Tar Heels are not ready to surrender our N.C. soul to the devil in the details of privatized, free-market, boot-legged, get-rich-off-taxpayers schemes misrepresented to us as better school opportunities. Luddy and his ilk are coming for our wallets and, what's worse, for our futures. (Liebl, 2013, lines 15–16)

Accountability Concerns Awaken Opposition

Nearly 20 years following the opening of the first charter school in North Carolina, the financial self-dealing of some charter school operators seemed to energize the opposition into action, at least as measured by more significant contributions to the public space of daily

newspapers' editorial pages. As Frey (2013) noted in the following letter to the editor published in *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer:*

> Many charters are simply flaky experiments at taxpayer expense. While some charter schools are excellent, most are not. There is no evidence that charters as a whole provide a 'better' education than traditional schools. (Frey, 2013, lines 8-10)

In the same vein, a letter to the editor published in *The Charlotte Observer* bemoaned the ongoing budget cuts to traditional public schools and the perils of an education reform strategy based primarily on charter schools and other public school alternatives, noting the following:

> Unfortunately, the N.C. General Assembly continues to struggle to come up with a viable and competitive teacher compensation plan, but at the same time had no problems finding tax money to give to private schools and passing legislation that reduces transparency and accountability of tax-funded charter schools. Teachers and public education are not their priority. (Linthicum, 2014, lines 9-13)

Mainstream News Starts Questioning

Mainstream news outlets such as the *Wilmington Star News* began publishing reports and editorials that had originally appeared in blogs, electronic newsletters, and online publications regarding a leading charter school operator's financial self-dealing at the public's expense. The ensuing scandal was made possible by North Carolina's lax charter-school oversight, which includes minimal monitoring for compliance. Ironically, the General Assembly successfully loosened rather than tightened accountability by lessening requirements for charter school teachers and eliminating criminal background checks for charter school employees (NCDPI, 2014). As Wang (2014) discussed in this editorial published first in ProPublica in partnership with *The (*Raleigh) *News & Observer* and the national *Daily Beast* and then by *The* (Wilmington) *Star News*:

> Douglass Academy was an unusual choice [for a statewide tour sponsored by Americans for Prosperity, a Koch brothers-funded advocacy group]. A few weeks before, the school had been warned by the state about low enrollment. It had just 35 students, roughly half the state's minimum. And a month earlier, a local newspaper had reported that federal regulators were investigating the school's operations.
>
> But the school has other attributes that may have appealed to the Koch group. The school's founder, a politically active North Carolina businessman named Baker Mitchell, shares the Kochs' free-market ideals. His model for success embraces decreased government regulation, increased privatization and, if all goes well, healthy corporate profits.
>
> In that regard, Mitchell, 74, appears to be thriving. Every year, millions of public education dollars flow through Mitchell's chain of four nonprofit charter schools to for-profit companies he controls.
>
> The schools buy or lease nearly everything from companies owned by Mitchell. Their desks. Their computers. The training they provide to teachers. Most of the land and buildings. Unlike with traditional school districts, at Mitchell's charter schools there's no competitive bidding. No evidence of haggling over rent or contracts.
>
> The schools have all hired the same for-profit management company to run their day-to-day operations. The company, Roger Bacon Academy, is owned by Mitchell. It functions as the schools' administrative arm, taking the lead in hiring and firing school staff. It handles most of the bookkeeping. The treasurer of the nonprofit that controls the four schools is also the chief financial officer of Mitchell's management company. The two organizations even share a bank account.
>
> Mitchell's management company was chosen by the schools' nonprofit board, which Mitchell was on at the time—an arrangement that is illegal in many other states.

An editorial titled "This!? Is the future of public education?" in *The Progressive Pulse*, a blog associated with NC Policy Watch, Schoefeld (2013) broke the following story, which was eventually picked up by some mainstream news outlets after going viral online:

> Consider, for instance, the Winston-Salem charter school profiled in a new NC Policy Watch investigation by reporter Sarah Ovaska. The school—Quality Education Academy—is, by all indications, a gussied-up basketball factory. As Sarah reports in great detail, the tax dollar-supported public school has been recruiting and enrolling basketball players from all over the nation and the world—some of whom it has apparently housed in an unsupervised makeshift dorm owned by the school's founder and CEO. What's more, the basketball coach it employs to oversee all of this is a man with a very troubled past.

> Things have been so bad at this place that, at one point in 2010, three Serbian students on the basketball team actually sent an email to State Superintendent June Atkinson begging for help:
>
> "We are international students from Serbia and we are going to Quality Education Academy but we have big problem cause we are Seniors and they won't let us graduate this year,cause they put us to reclass the eleven without our promition and we can't graduate and that is a big problem cause we whanted to go to college next year.
>
> We get a full scholarship but we still had to pay 4000$ each to Isaac Pitts.He is a Head Athletic Coach in our school. Thank you for your concern hope to hear from you soon."
>
> And in a testament to how overwhelmed and impotent the tiny charter school staff is at the Department of Public Instruction (and how little oversight it is able to provide to the state's charters), nothing was ever really done about this pathetic story or the troubles it should have opened DPI's eyes to. Indeed, in 2012, DPI granted the school's CEO authorization to open another charter! (paragraphs 7-10)

Across the state, a private school in Lumberton that converted to a charter school was forced to reopen its one-day enrollment period, which was held the day after it received approval from the state for its new charter, after a formal complaint was filed by the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, alleging that the 24-hour enrollment period may have excluded potential students (Rockett, 2013). In a response quoted in *The Fayetteville Observer*, the school's board chairman stated:

> We understand the concerns raised . . . that there could be children who were not given adequate notice or time to register for the upcoming academic year. While we are still not aware of any children who actually were denied the ability to register, we recognize the importance of avoiding even the perception of that taking place. (Rockett, 2013, para. 9)

Eventually, the growing number of blogs, online news, columns, editorials, and negative national news attention focused on North Carolina's conservative reform movement and massive cuts in public school funding increased calls for greater accountability and transparency in the charter school sector.

While earlier charter school closings often went unremarked by citizens, news reports about the abrupt, mid-year closure of a large charter school in Charlotte amidst allegations of financial mismanagement in 2014 sparked outrage in this letter published by *The Charlotte Observer:*

> Charter school salesmen describe their industry as a "movement."
>
> It is an anti-government political and economic movement preying on our poorest neighbors.
>
> Its goal is to discredit, disrupt and defund our public schools and replace them with semi-private academies that the organizers are paid to operate with money from public school budgets.
>
> But when these free-marketers fail—either with individual students who posed too great a challenge for their inadequate services or more spectacularly like StudentFirst Academy—they want the maligned "government school system" to back them up or bail them out. (Simmons, 2014, lines 6-18)

The hue and cry was only exacerbated when *The* (Wilmington) *Star News* and other news outlets were denied access to financial information about charter school operations and salaries despite repeated requests – access charter operators agreed to provide when they received their charters from the State Board of Education (NCPDI, 2014). Accusing charter school operators of "selectively deciding how they will disclose salary information," an editorial published *The Charlotte Observer* called the fear of disruption among staff members a "specious argument" designed to circumvent North Carolina's public record and open meeting laws:

> N.C. public records law requires that public bodies disclose names, salaries and positions of employees, even in cases where most of the personnel file is deemed confidential. To receive a charter, charter school governing boards must agree to abide by public records and open meetings laws.
>
> So, while it may be uncomfortable for charter schools to release this information—as it is for traditional schools—it is the law. The employees are public employees, and as such their salaries are open to public scrutiny. (*The Charlotte Observer*, 2014, lines 31-37)

Charters Reject Calls for Greater Transparency

Yet, despite the consistent insistence that charter schools are public schools, and the movement's skillful use of the legislative process and the courts to secure favorable public policies and increased funding, many North Carolina charter school operators and advocates actively resisted complying with public records requests detailing their financial arrangements, including payments to charter management companies and consultants, facility costs, capital expenditures, and teacher and principal salaries, among others. As the editorial page writers for *The* (Wilmington) *Star News* (2014) noted,

> . . . Gov. Pat McCrory should refuse to sign any bill that does not unequivocally state that charter schools, funded overwhelmingly by taxpayers' money, are subject to the same disclosure rules as 'other' public schools. Of all people, Republican lawmakers who rode into office decrying wasteful spending surely recognize that the best remedy for that thing they so despise is transparency—especially when it comes to how tax dollars are spent. (as quoted by Wolfe, 2014, lines 23-28)

The North Carolina State Board of Education and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction finally weighed in on the controversy in August of 2014, directing all charter schools to submit records regarding the taxpayer-funded salaries of any staff employed by charter management companies by September 30. However, in response to advocacy by privately held, for-profit charter management companies, the General Assembly adopted legislation (SB 793 Charter School Modifications) exempting disclosure of salary information for their employees, while requiring disclosure of charter school teacher and principal salaries, and any compensation paid to members of the charter schools' non-profit boards (NC Policy Watch, 2014). Governor McCrory signed the measure shortly thereafter (NC Policy Watch, 2014).

Popularity Does Not Quell Controversy

Despite apparently widespread popularity among parents and elected officials, charter schools remain hotly contested in North Carolina, particularly regarding the role of pro-charter

school policies in exacerbating longstanding issues of race and class in public schooling, as well as the potentially negative impact of charter school growth on students left behind in legacy public school systems. Significant concerns have arisen regarding the hyper-segregation by race and class of students in charter schools and equity of access when charter schools are not required to provide transportation, special education, and free- or reduced-priced meals.

Charter school proponents have won most of the public relations and political battles to date and the sector remains ripe for abuse in North Carolina. The state department of education maintains a very small office that cannot possibly provide adequate oversight and monitoring of 148 schools, while legislative victories have kept charter schools' financial operations, pay scales, and cozy relationships between the non-profit boards and the private companies away from public view. Financial self-dealing and other ethical concerns involving charter school owner-operators and for-profit charter management companies have generated major investigative journalism reports in Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Arizona, and Louisiana, among other states, yet these issues have largely gone unreported in North Carolina's mainstream press. A notable exception is *The (*Wilmington) *Star News*, which has partnered with an alternative online news site to investigate how one of the state's leading charter proponents and his family have earned millions on the backs of public school children and taxpayers.

The Role of Gov. Hunt

It's also interesting to note that Governor James B. Hunt, who was elected to office three times on the basis of bipartisan support, remained largely silent on the charter school issue throughout his first two terms, at least in terms of what appeared in the data set for this study, even as he was actively pursuing his quest to make North Carolina first in the nation in education. After a mid-1990s report on SAT scores showed the state lagging near the bottom in the U.S., Hunt unveiled a vision for public education that included aggressive public school reforms and

significant investments in early childhood, teacher pay, and accountability through standardized testing (Hunt, 2001).

Given Hunt's oft-stated desire to keep North Carolina public schools on the forefront of school reform, his silence on charter schools is intriguing. Some pundits viewed his support of charter school legislation as a concession to Republicans in order to gain their backing for his major education reform initiatives (*Winston-Salem Journal*, 2009). As the editors stated:

> Enacted in the mid-1990s, North Carolina's charter schools law was designed to contain the charter movement. The Democratic-led Senate consented to the charters despite opposition because House Republicans, who controlled that chamber, held out for them. But since then Democrats have led both chambers of the legislature and the governor's office and they refuse to improve the law (lines 15-19).

Others saw him lining up with the national Democratic platform on education in alignment with President Bill Clinton, a vocal and enthusiastic supporter of charter schools (*News and Observer,* 1996).

Regardless of his rationale, Gov. Hunt endorsed and signed into law charter legislation in 1995. He remains greatly admired by for his contributions to public education. As the Greensboro *News & Record* stated,

> It's an audacious dream for a state with schools long considered among the worst in the nation. There are plenty of obstacles to overcome: widespread poverty, disengaged parents, teacher shortages, schools crippled by years of neglect and low expectations. (1999, lines 14-16)

According to Hunt, who reiterated his vision in his 1999 State of the State Address,

> Never before in our history have we set such an ambitious goal. And never before have we needed a statewide effort of this scope. Our future is at stake. (as cited in the Greensboro *News & Record*, 1999, lines 47-48)

Lastly, an important theme that did not rise to the level of a major frame but nonetheless merits further study is the notion that governance by a privately chartered and invitation-only board is somehow more democratic and accessible to parents than a school board they help to elect. This issue seems particularly acute in a state like North Carolina, where the private boards of the non-profit organizations that run many of the state's charter schools are exempt from open meeting and public records laws. As Ed Williams, then editorial page editor of *The Charlotte Observer* sagely noted (1995), "The pathway to justice is not always clear." Indeed.

The next and final chapter of this dissertation connects the findings to the broader historical and cultural contexts outlined in Chapter II. Chapter IV provides additional insight into how the strategic use of political discourse helped the charter school movement win favorable public policies and secure a permanent and growing foothold in the public education landscape. Implications for the professional practice of educational leaders and future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

> Democracy is about making wise collective choices. Democracy in education and education in democracy are not quaint legacies from a distant and happier time. They have never been more essential to wise self-rule than they are today.
>
> —David Tyack (2003, p. 185)

Charter schools remain hotly contested nationally and in North Carolina, despite achieving unequivocal public relations success as an ideological and political movement that has garnered bipartisan support during a time when political divisions are more the norm (Tyack, 2003). Since 2008-09, the number of charter schools in the U.S. has grown by 80% (CREDO, 2013). Doubts linger, however, regarding the scalability and exclusivity of charter schools, and there is a glaring lack of credible evidence to justify the continued growth and expansion of the charter school sector (Bartlett et al., 2002; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Betts & Tang, 2011; Bulkley et al., 2010; Buras & Apple, 2005; CREDO, 2009, 2013; Sirota, 2014; Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Erickson, 2011; Gerwitz et al., 2004; Gleason et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2009; May, 2006; Robelen, 2009).

In North Carolina, which in many ways serves as a microcosm of the United States in terms of changing demographics, the number of charter schools (currently at 148, including 27 that opened in the 2014-15 school year) is predicted to double by as early as 2018 (Ash, 2014; NCDPI, 2014). North Carolina charter schools are also extremely popular with a diverse group of parents, despite well-documented concerns about the hyper-segregation along the traditional cultural divides of race and class (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, 2007; Bifulco et al., 2009; Clotfelter et

al., 2002; Ladd, 2012; Massey, 1990; Mock, 2010; Morgan, 1980; Mullen et al., 2013; NCDPI, 2014; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Discussion of the Major Frames

Findings Reflect Racial and Cultural Conflicts

As the findings indicate, four primary frames emerged from the data, including freedom, choice, equity, and accountability. Each of these frames contains multiple themes and reflects various aspects of the historic and ongoing racial, ideological and cultural battles being fought in North Carolina. Writers using the freedom and choice frames, for example, typically packaged charter schools as a positive and significant school reform movement that conveyed benefits to all stakeholder groups, including traditional public schools. Charter school proponents also deployed the equity and accountability frames, although to a much lesser extent than either the freedom or choice frames.

A close reading of the texts, as well as additional historical and critical analysis, reveals that the media's embrace of the charter school movement was cultivated in strategic ways by its leading proponents, who skillfully maintained message consistency and discipline in their framing of the problems of public education and the promises posted by charter schools. These proponents often self-identified as charter school operators and board members, and many were (and remain) active in political circles as partisan organizers, donors, and campaign managers. These political activists were frequently associated with a set of inter-related Republican, conservative, and faith-based groups such as the John W. Pope Civitas Institute, John Locke Foundation, North Carolina Parents for Educational Freedom, and the John William Pope Foundation (Kromm, 2010).

The non-profit North Carolina Parents for Educational Freedom (NCPEF), a pro-charter advocacy group cited often in news articles, for example, received $1.8 million in donations in

2013, according to IRS documents, and spent more than $1.6 million to "educate [the] public concerning edu[cational] opportunities in NC to improve NC's K-12 education by informing and empowering parents, particularly low-income families, to choose the education they determine is best for their child(ren)" (Parents for Educational Freedom in NC, 2013). The organization's executive director, Darrell Allison, earned more than $167,085 in salary and related compensation (not including benefits); the non-profit organization's vice chairman, one of 10 board members, William Cobey, Jr., now serves as president of the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Revealing a deep understanding of politics, charter school proponents were also highly skilled in staging public events, typically with parents and students in tow, designed to garner maximum media coverage and public sympathy (NCPEF, 2014). Proponents also engaged parents early and often in public policy debates, using websites and social media to encourage parents to sign petitions, contact legislators, share their stories, and make donations to the pro-charter, pro-choice cause. As a result, charter school parents were quoted and published as much as charter school operators and owners in the data set examined as part of this study, a finding that merits further research.

The passionate call by many eloquent parents for more publicly financed school options may help explain why newspaper editors and elected officials were (and remain) so responsive to the movement. By way of contrast, parents of children enrolled in public schools were much less engaged in the charter school debate, as were public school officials. In retrospect, their silence spoke volumes and may have led legislators to believe that most parents were dissatisfied with their public schools, given that is who they were hearing from most often in the press. The pro-public school voice began rising in opposition in 2014 only after the legislative attacks on public schools had reached such a crescendo that "activist" teachers threatened walk out and major

national news outlets started reporting regularly on North Carolina's public school woes (Klein, 2013).

Critics of charter schools, on the other hand, were more likely to use equity and accountability frames, questioning the movement's public school claims, given the well-documented exclusion of many student groups, particularly those with lower test scores, behavioral challenges, language barriers, and special needs. Interestingly, even editorial-page items that were coded as more favorable to traditional public schools often echo similarly positive frames on charter schools and negative frames on public schools. The belief that public schools are failing was nearly unanimous in the texts, even when there was deep disagreement about whether charter schools represented an effective strategy for public school reform.

Controlling Discourse Leads to Legislative Wins

The strategic and wise use of discourse has helped charter school advocates win major legislative and State Board of Education victories in North Carolina, victories that are at least partially due to their success in controlling the media framing of this ideological and political movement. These legislative wins include securing policies that favor the charter school sector by lifting the cap on growth, approving dozens of new charter school applications and increasing funding for two online virtual schools. In response to pressure from charter school advocates, the legislature also has reduced licensing requirements for charter school teachers, eliminated criminal background check obligations for charter school employees, and maintained the privacy of records containing potentially embarrassing financial disclosures by charter schools' private sector partners (NCDPI, 2014; NC Policy Watch, 2014). While charter schools' funding streams are guaranteed legislatively, traditional public schools have experienced the equivalent of a $646.7 million drop in operational funds due to changes in funding allocations put in place by the General Assembly since the 2008-09 school-year (NCDPI, 2014).

Charter school advocates also attempted to move jurisdiction over their growing sector from the North Carolina State Board of Education to a newly formed Charter School Advisory Board handpicked by the powerful Senate President Pro-Tem and Speaker of the House. This legislative move prompted an angry response from the governor and his newly appointed State Board of Education chairman, both longtime charter school proponents. After extensive legislative wrangling, the charter school measure was modified to keep final approval with the State Board of Education while allowing the legislature to appoint a separate Charter School Advisory Committee (NCGA, 2013). Gov. McCrory later filed suit to block members of his own party from trying to take away the executive branch's authority to appoint boards and committees (Ohnesorge, 2014; Ovaska, 2013).

These actions, while dismaying to many public school advocates, earned North Carolina special recognition from the American Legislative Exchange Council, a pro-business conservative policy-making machine that is helping fuel the corporate takeover of public education by drafting cookie-cutter templates for charter school authorization, vouchers ("opportunity scholarships"), A-F school grading schemes, private school tuition-tax credits, corporate tax breaks for companies that donate to private school scholarship foundations for low-income children, and other legislation designed to break the public school monopoly (Hui, 2014). As Hui (2014) noted in this *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer* item,

> While North Carolina didn't get the top grade among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, ALEC singled out the state in a section titled "North Carolina lawmakers go big on K-12 reform in 2013."
>
> The praise isn't surprising considering that the Republican-led General Assembly has adopted several laws dealing with education and other topics that mirror model legislation put out by ALEC, which closely ties corporations and conservative policy makers. (paras. 2-3)

While proponents of this effort say their goal is to improve public education, critics suspect the real mission is to keep engaged parents happy with charter schools and private school tuition vouchers, while cutting taxes, lowering teacher salaries, and reducing states' long-term debt obligations for public school pensions. Rendered irrelevant by those in power, legacy public school systems will lapse into the education version of public health, becoming chronically underfunded wastelands for the dispossessed (Barnett, 2011; NC Policy Watch, 2014; Ravitch, 2010).

Charter Movement as PR Success Story

Regardless of whether charter schools improve educational outcomes for children, the movement can certainly serve as a case study for public relations and public affairs practitioners seeking to win in the court of public opinion and public policy formation. Charter proponents successfully framed public schools as failures and charters as the preferred school reform solution with discipline and fidelity, while marshalling an effective coalition that moves as one from the grassroots to the grass tops (Bergan, Gerber, Green and Panagopoulos, 2005; Canovan, 1999; Carty, 2010; Jenkins, 1983). The success of charter schools in engaging their parents in civic debate and dialogue also is impressive and could inform others seeking to mobilize grassroots support for traditional public schools or other public policy initiatives. Passions run high in public education, especially in a nation where universal public education was a movement unto itself.

Not surprisingly, given the well-funded nature of the charter school movement, a close reading of the texts, as evidenced by excerpts quoted previously in the findings section of this dissertation, shows that many charter school proponents used discourse aligned with the Charter School Messaging Notebook, an online guide published by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) that updated the group's earlier publications on charter school marketing and public relations (NAPCS, 2014). As the guide noted in its introduction,

> We hope this guide will help fine-tune the messaging you use on your website and in press releases, speeches, and media interviews. The results are clear: when we use words that work, people like what they hear—and that means more support for charter schools. (NAPCS, 2014, p. 3)

In particular, the Charter School Marketing Guide's "Say This, Not That" table is instructive as it encourages charter school proponents to avoid corporate-style words like "consumers," "market share," and "competition" that might lend credence to privatization concerns, language that characterized the rhetoric of North Carolina charter school critics in the equity frame. Instead, charter school proponents are urged to talk about "families," "student share," and "innovation"—hallmarks of the freedom and choice frames (2014, p. 8; see also Appendix D).

Better Schools, or Simply More Marketing?

Given the market-based competition set up between charter and public schools in North Carolina, the emphasis on school marketing and public relations is likely to increase, and public school principals and other officials will start to get more assertive and aggressive, deploying direct mailers, paid media, social media, and data-based marketing that is more on par with the sophisticated student recruitment campaigns currently being waged by charter school operators (Carr, 2010). As charter schools continue to expand unabated in North Carolina, it will be interesting to see whether more tax dollars start going to advertising and brand marketing, how that shift of funding allocations will affect what is spent on classroom instruction and students, and how parents and the public will respond to these changes.

More legislation is anticipated that will mandate further resource sharing and collaboration between and among legacy public school systems and charter schools, despite the fact that North Carolina's current legislation encourages competition rather than cooperation (Rofes, 1998; Hill, Pierce, & Guthrie, 2009; Pillow, 2014). If the trends experienced in other

states that have already journeyed down this road are any indication, a wave of public school closures is on the horizon (Ravitch, 2010). Typically, for legacy public schools systems, this sharing and collaboration is one sided. The legacy public school system must open its advanced courses, summer camps, athletics programs, professional development opportunities, and fine arts productions to charter students while continuing to send ever-increasing amounts of funding to charter schools (Ravitch, 2010). The reverse is rarely true (Ravitch, 2010). As is so often the case in public education, for the foreseeable future, change is the only constant.

A David and Goliath Story

Legacy public schools and public school systems are the (soon to be) dead giants in the classic David vs. Goliath tale. Public affairs case studies will likely applaud how the more nimble and flexible charter school movement outmaneuvered the more powerful, but slow moving public school bureaucracy through persistent attacks in the media and successful guerilla warfare, even if the recognition is lacking that this war game was organized and funded away from the public eye by a handful of fabulously wealthy business and foundation leaders (Gladwell, 2006; Ravitch, 2010).

The apparent lack of response by public school officials that emerged from this analysis was disappointing but not surprising based on my personal experience in working with educators for more than 25 years. Whether the absence of media engagement on the charter school issue until relatively late in the game reflects sampling error, collective denial, or professional training to abstain from politics remains fodder for a future study. Given the perceived and often excoriated political power of these groups, and the extensive number of articles that were reviewed at least once prior to sample selection, the collective silence was stunning.

Wrestling with the "D" Word

While the public relations and political success of the charter school movement in North Carolina is instructive, race and class remain the unnamed yet always present specters that continue to haunt any discussion or public policy issue about public education. This is true for traditional public schools as well as charter schools. When one of the state's leading newspapers, *The* (Raleigh) *News & Observer*, refers to diversity as the "d-word" on its editorial pages as a means of calling attention to the unmentionable elephant in the room in this supposedly postmodern, post-racial era, something is clearly amiss in the ability of North Carolina elected officials, parents, and citizens to engage in rational and healing public discourse about racial matters, including access and equity (Ford, 2010).

Even when discreetly coded and repackaged as the desire for more local control (freedom frame) and parental choice (the choice frame), or, as a new civil and human right (the equity frame), the hidden corollaries of racism and classicism fester. Similarly, just as most North Carolina's charter school proponents typically steered clear of the equity frame in media discourse, race, class, and related social justice concerns are largely ignored by the Charter School Marketing Guide, even though charter schools nationally serve a higher percentage of children of color and children who are low-income. (Interestingly, in North Carolina, this trend is reversed as charter schools serve slightly more white children and fewer poor and minority children [NCDPI, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c].) Instead, the guide offers a brief caution to avoid making "references or comparison to "white, higher-income students," especially when speaking to parents and "other broad audiences" (p. 10). Such discourse "makes people bristle, so use it carefully," the guide cautioned (p. 14).

Yet, public schools, whether found in legacy urban systems, affluent suburbs, isolated rural areas, or newly constituted charters, are not immune from the ongoing struggle associated

with race and poverty in the United States. The recent heartbreak and rage manifested in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City illustrate the danger of repressing and ignoring long-festering inequities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; hooks, 2000; Smith, 2014). Better that citizens, educators, and policy makers "bristle" and stay in the conversation than back away and wait for rage to accumulate past the breaking point (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; hooks, 2000; Schwalbe, 2008).

Lacking a common language and the requisite facilitative skills for productive discourse and civic engagement, we retreat into ideologically driven positions, throwing stones at each other and fighting over ways to divide a dwindling public pie while children and young people continue to suffer (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; hooks, 2000; Schwalbe, 2008). Future research must address all of these issues, and should include additional historical and critical-discourse analyses. The impact of the past on the present makes it unwise to research any form of public schooling, including the charter school movement, without also investigating the parallel processes of white and elite resistance to civil and disability rights, desegregation, affirmative action, immigration, Obamacare, and other social justice concerns. Doing so yields an incomplete picture, and increases the likelihood that public policies and programs based on this incomplete analysis will fail.

Similarly, liberal and progressive failures to realize the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the heroic gains of the Civil Rights Era must be analyzed more fully in future studies. Assuming ill-intent by those with opposing points of view does not create the common ground needed for civil discourse, whether the "other" is liberal, conservative, or somewhere in between. Many of those toiling in the fertile fields of charter schools are doing so because they could not gain traction for their ideas in the current system, or felt their children were being poorly served. Senior citizens have real concerns about managing tax increases on limited incomes. Parents make choices they feel are best for their children, as is their right. Yet public

education is a public good paid for with public dollars. These private choices will have public consequences. How well we navigate the turbulent waters of race, class, power, and ideology will determine whether we recreate the current disparities and inequities, or move toward something better.

Without a deeper and more complete understanding of what underlies the challenges confronting public schooling today, policy makers are doomed to continue pursuing reform strategies that promise much but may actually harm the very students who need excellent public schools the most. Meanwhile, North Carolina continues to flounder as safeguards against discrimination and profiteering are stripped away, all in the name of public school reform. As an editorial in *The Mountaineer* (2013) noted, "North Carolina legislators have spent a lot of time this session introducing legislation to reform education. But so far, we have not seen many bills that would benefit the public school systems in the state" (lines 2-5).

Common Ground Remains Elusive

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, as this critical analysis of media discourse made clear, North Carolinians continue to struggle to find common understanding, let alone any common ground, when it comes to issues of race, class, and the purpose of public schooling. Investigating charter and public school efficacy within the historical and contemporary cultural contexts in which schools operate cannot be ignored, especially when supposed color and class-blind policies such as open enrollment, randomized lotteries, and discipline policies result in consistent findings of exclusion and disproportionality based on race (Estes, 2004; Fiori et al., 2000; Frankenberg et al., 2010; Frieden, 2003; Garcia, 2008; Hehir, 2010; Johnson, 2006; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998; Meyer, 2010; Myers, 2008; Papitch, 2014; Vasquez-Heilig, 2013; Vasquez-Heilig & Brown, 2012; Vasquez-Heilig & Holmes, 2013; Vaught, 2009; Wamba & Ascher, 2003). These same issues continue to constrain outcomes for poor and minority

students in every school setting, public, charter, private, and parochial in the U.S. The exceptions are notable and newsworthy simply because such exceptions are unusual, and go against the expected patterns well-documented in the research. Clearly, myths about charter school successes are as rampant as the myths about public school failures. As the literature review indicated, the reality is somewhere in between for both sectors.

Similarly, traditional public schools systems, including my employer, have dozens of magnet schools, specialized academies, college access programs, and special education programs and schools that also sort and sift students by interest, talent, intelligence, disability, English language status, gender, and other student characteristics. The challenge in my district and in public education nationally, is that the student enrollment in these programs tends to mirror the same racial- and class-based inequities found in U.S. society as whole. Thus, children of color, particularly young black males, are overenrolled in special education programs, over-identified as having behavioral disorders, and under-enrolled in gifted programs, Advanced Placement classes, and college-preparatory courses, just to site a few of the most common examples. Student demographics by race, class, disability, and English language status also vary widely in traditional elementary and middle schools as well as in comprehensive high schools, serving as reflections of the community's broader economic distributions and housing patterns.

Within this milieu, differentiating between and among the different types of public schools is challenging, and some would say, counterproductive. However, if charter schools can't break the stranglehold that race and class have on student outcomes in public education in North Carolina and nationally without skimming the more academically able students, counseling out struggling learners, and benefiting from preferential treatment in public policy, then the movement won't accomplish its most important mission. If legacy public school systems are crippled beyond repair in order to advantage charter schools, tuition vouchers, privatization, and

other public school alternatives in the name of school reform, then North Carolina and the nation as a whole may take a giant step backwards in terms of achieving greater equity and social justice in public schooling, losing the very real gains that have been made despite the ongoing challenges.

Regardless of the stance taken on charter schools and legacy public schools—and my personal and professional frames clearly tend to focus on equity and social justice—substantive concerns regarding equity, transparency, access, quality, governance, and student outcomes cannot simply be brushed aside as irrelevant, or pointed to solely as evidence of self-interest and resistance to change. The same is true regarding decades of data showing longstanding achievement gaps and disparate outcomes between white, middle class students and nearly all other students groups. Public schooling is just one system of many, all of which are embedded in broader social realities. Structural racism, implicit bias, and academic inequities that result in poor outcomes for children of color are not the sole purview of traditional public school educators, any more than selective admissions criteria and counseling out students who may be more challenging to educate are the sole purview of North Carolina's charter schools.

When the first free public school opened in North Carolina in Rockingham County on January 20, 1840, it opened for white children only. Black children were not served by any public schools until after the Civil War. Centuries later, despite the state's constitutional pledge to support public education for its citizens, the debates rage on about who controls and benefits from public tax dollars spent on North Carolina's public schools (Learn NC, 2009). As Dornan (1998) noted, the answer to that question will shape public policy—and children's futures—for decades to come. North Carolinians also have not yet found common ground on the core purposes of public education despite nearly 175 years of practice.

In the middle of this raging storm, the shoreline seems very far away, and danger ever present. Right now the great ship of public education is sinking, and there are not enough lifeboats currently on deck to save all our children from the rising tides of racism, poverty, and neglect fostered by this new gilded age (Krugman, 2014). As we chart a new course in education, the test for North Carolina—and the nation—is whether the discriminatory and oppressive patterns of old are repeated or whether more equitable and socially just schools for all children are created. All children deserve schools that transform lives, futures, and communities. Yet, public schooling in any form remains as imperfect as the communities and societies it reflects, and as poignant and powerful as the hearts and minds of the young people it inspires to something better.

My hope, as always, lies in the untapped potential and giftedness of every child, the resilience of our people, and most importantly, the dedication of our educators who continue to serve children well despite the obstacles policy makers create for them.

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APPENDIX A

CDA CODING SCHEME

Adapted from Wenden, A. L. (2005). The politics of representation: A critical discourse analysis of Aljazeera special report. *International Journal of Peace Studies, 10*(2), p. 112 (Appendix 2).

I. Technical Information and Context
Name of article:
Name of newspaper:
Name of author:
Position and status of author/reporter within the newspaper (editor, reporter, guest columnist, op-ed writer, title/organization [if provided], etc.):
What prompted the article?
Section of newspaper? (Editorial, Letters to the Editor, posted comment, news, other [please describe]:
Page number:
Date:
What are the headings and subheadings?
II. Identifying the Discursive Frames, Topics and Themes
What are the major discourse frames, topics, and/or themes?
What general statements about the topic of the discourse can be derived from the themes?

What concept of charter schools does the article presuppose and convey?
What concept of public education/public schooling does the article presuppose and convey?
What concept of American society does the article presupposed and convey?
III. Justifying/Legitimating the Ideology
Public policy problem definition
What problem or concern is the writer trying to solve or address? How is that problem or concern defined? What adjectives are used to describe the problem or concern?
What solution is the writer offering to the problem?
Mode of reasoning
Is the representation of the actions, events, conditions in the discourse contextualized, or decontextualized?

Attribution of agency
Are the persons or groups responsible for actions, events, conditions represented in the discourse made explicit? If so, who are they? If not, whose participation/responsible action is being hidden?

Characterization
• What words or expressions does the author use to *characterize* the event, persons, and situation under discussion? (attributions, x is …….; terms used to describe/identify)
Which metaphors, allusions, idioms, sayings, clichés, are used to explain and enhance the author's representation of the event, persons, and/or situation under discussion?
What code words are used to send certain signals to the reader?
Exclusion
What kind of information has not been included or only implied in the discourse?
Specificity
What information is presented in detail? What kind of information is presented in more general terms? What "facts" are presented as "givens" or presupposed?

Perspective, standpoint
From what perspective, position, or standpoint is the author writing?
From what perspective, position, or standpoint does the author assume the reader is understanding, or accessing the text?
Tone
Is the writer general positive, neutral/balanced, or negative toward charter schools?
Is the writer generally positive, neutral/balanced, or negative toward traditional public schools/public education?
How would you describe the vocabulary and style? (Folky? Common sense? Direct? Intellectual/academic? Emotional or personal? Other?)
Social Actors
What social actors and/or voices are referenced? How are they described? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
What social actors and/or voices are excluded, or missing? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Notes, Insights, and Peculiarities
Other notes, insights, or peculiarities about the text?

APPENDIX B

COLOR CODING SCHEME FOR FRAME ANALYSIS

Color	**Frame/Theme**
Pink	Innovative, creative, new solutions
Light Yellow	Choice, parental choice, family choice, right to choose, choice as a civil right, choice as a parental right, parental control, equal opportunity to choose
Orange	Cost, cost-savings, cost-effectiveness, lower costs, less expensive
Blue	Freedom, freedom from bureaucracy, freedom from school boards, central office administrators, government interference, rules, regulations
Dark Yellow	Resegregation, desegregation, integration, exclusion, inclusion, equity, access, lack of access, dumping, skimming, charter school refugees
Red	Privatization, marketization, competition, improvement through market choice and competition, free enterprise, market theory
Light Green	Monitoring, accountability, lack of transparency,
Purple	Better student outcomes
Light Blue	Failing public schools, public school failure, poor public school outcomes, poor student outcomes, low achievement levels, low test scores

APPENDIX C

LIST OF NORTH CAROLINA NEWSPAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN FINAL DATA SET FOR ANALYSIS

1. *Chapel Hill Herald*
2. *Charlotte Observer, The*
3. *Citizen Times, The*
4. *Daily News, The (Jacksonville)*
5. *Fayetteville Observer, The*
6. *Free Press, The (Kinston)*
7. *Herald-Sun, (The Durham)*
8. *Hickory Daily Record*
9. *High Point Enterprise*
10. *Morning Star, (Wilmington)*
11. *Mountaineer, The (Waynesville)*
12. *News & Observer, The (Raleigh)*
13. *News & Record (Greensboro), The*
14. *Robesonian, The (Lumberton)*
15. *Sanford Herald, The*
16. *Shelby Star, The*
17. *Star-News (Wilmington), The*
18. *Star News Online*
19. *Triangle Business Journal*
20. *Winston-Salem Journal*

APPENDIX D

SAY THIS, NOT THAT TABLE REPRINTED FROM THE CHARTER SCHOOL MARKETING GUIDE

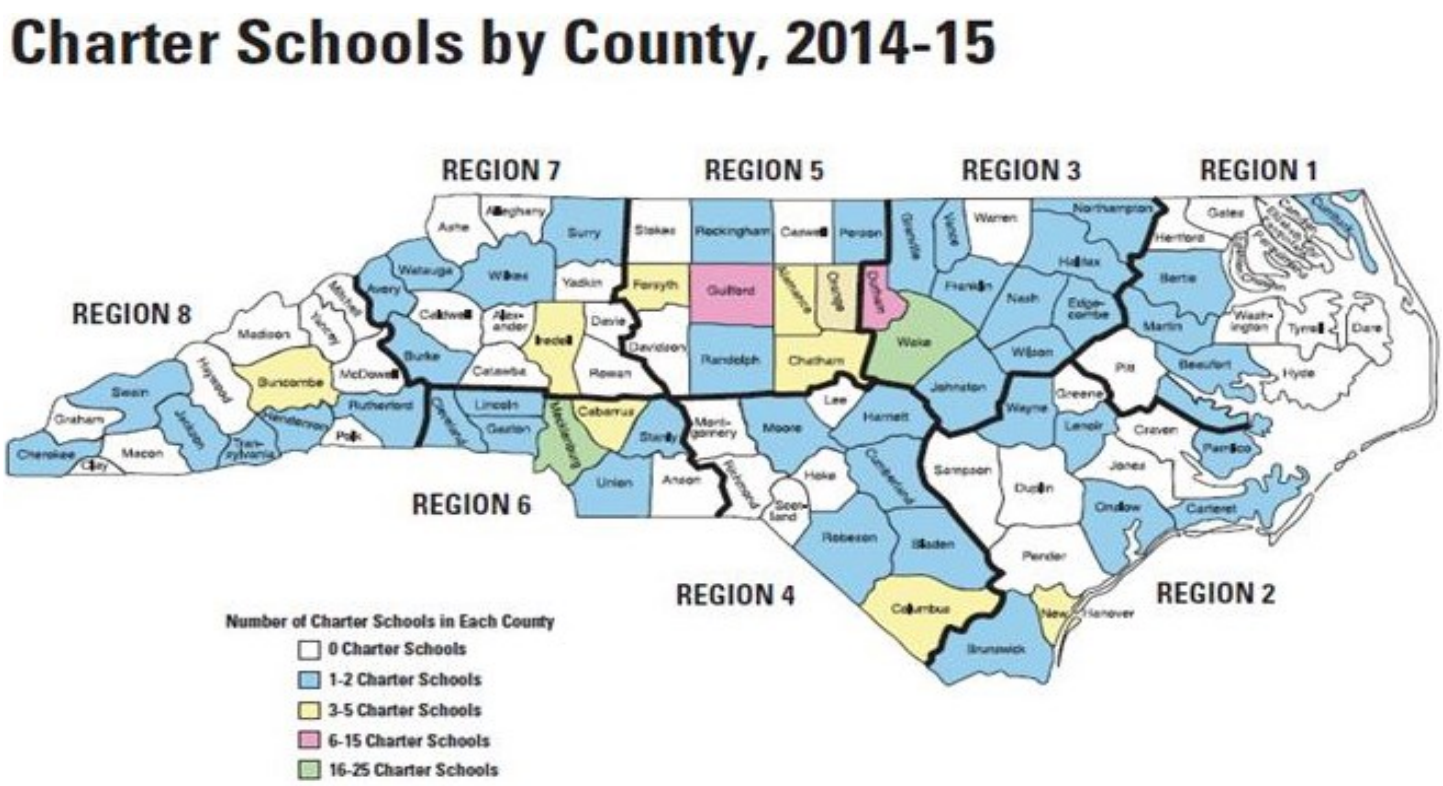
Say This, Not That

Because charter schools are often attacked for being an effort to "privatize" public education, we should avoid using language that sounds corporate. And we must always keep coming back to the fact that we are talking about students, schools, and teachers.

Say This	Not This
Charter school community	Charter school sector
Enrollment form	Application
Network	CMO/EMO; management organization
Schools	Businesses/companies
Teachers or school leaders	Staff
Responsive to student needs	Experiments
Student share	Market share
Schools or school leaders	Operators
Accountability	Reform
Innovation	Competition or experimentation
Flexibility	Autonomy
Families	Consumers

APPENDIX E

NORTH CAROLINA CHARTER SCHOOLS BY COUNTY, 2014-15



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2015). Reprinted from www.ncpublicschools.org.

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE ARTICLE CODING

1 Reviewer
10/17/14 Date
F342 Article # 19

CDA CODING SCHEME

Adapted from Wenden, A. L. (2005). The politics of representation: A critical discourse analysis of Aljazeera special report. *International Journal of Peace Studies, 10*(2), p. 112 (Appendix 2).

I. Technical Information and Context
Name of article: For the Record: N.C. must approach charter school growth with caution
Name of newspaper: The Charlotte Observer
Name of author: Frank Morton
Position and status of author/reporter within the newspaper (editor, reporter, guest columnist, op-ed writer, title/organization [if provided], etc.): Board chair, Sugar Creek Charter School of Charlotte
What prompted the article? Rapid rise in N.C. charter school applications (71 for fall of 2015)
Section of newspaper? (Editorial, Letters to the Editor, posted comment, news, other [please describe]:
Page number: 18A "Special" = only sent to TCO
Date: Jan. 12, 2014
What are the headings and subheadings? None additional
II. Identifying the Discursive Frames, Topics and Themes
What are the major discourse frames, topics, and/or themes? Charters should have high standards, charters prompt improvement in public schools, innovation, beneficial, fill gaps, public
What general statements about the topic of the discourse can be derived from the themes? school failure charters can help low income kids ② transportation provided charter great for good leaders
What concept of charter schools does the article presuppose and convey? Positive, beneficial, creative, advanced, gifted, competitive, important, choice observer of opportunity

What concept of public education/public schooling does the article presuppose and convey?
weaker school leaders need more structure - must be forced to improve; kids fall thru cracks

What concept of American society does the article presupposed and convey? free market competition promotes better schools

III. Justifying/Legitimating the Ideology

Public policy problem definition

What problem or concern is the writer trying to solve or address? How is that problem or concern defined? What adjectives are used to describe the problem or concern? ~~failing~~ public ~~schools~~ too much charter growth too fast = quality concern. Equity issues re. access to charters for low income students

What solution is the writer offering to the problem? approve fewer, raise standards & require charters to provide transportation - give priority to charter that serve high-need students - more in line w original purposes

Mode of reasoning

Is the representation of the actions, events, conditions in the discourse contextualized, or decontextualized? more ~~contextualized~~ than most - indicates equity issues. Decontextualized re. accuracy/truthfulness of facts and implication re. public schools

Attribution of agency

Are the persons or groups responsible for actions, events, conditions represented in the discourse made explicit? If so, who are they? If not, whose participation/responsible action is being hidden?
Partial. Names educators and political leaders. Role of for-profit & privately held charter management companies & $ not addressed. May not apply in this charter

Characterization

What words or expressions does the author use to characterize the event, persons, and situation under discussion? (attributions, x is .....; terms used to describe/identify)
charter flourish, gifted, advanced, public schools fall through the cracks (students) weaker leaders = need more str
"local educational authority" will have to reduce staff
more parental choice, greater empowerment, more accountability, opportunity
single voice

"one of NC oldest & largest" charter "existing" = woo!

opportunity, vision, excellent, stand-alone school | nothing + forced to improve thru pain

Which metaphors, allusions, idioms, sayings, clichés, are used to explain and enhance the author's representation of the event, persons, and/or situation under discussion? choice, competition, "flourish" "firm believe" "advanced manufacturing" "opportunity" "sound operations" (financially) = very business-

What code words are used to send certain signals to the reader? Business - charters run more like businesses like = better than public schools, govt "authority"

Exclusion "low income" "single-parent" "inflexible schedule of management"

What kind of information has not been included or only implied in the discourse?

Public school successes. - research backing up biz claims, implications that public school principals are weaker, less gifted than charter prins

Specificity

What information is presented in detail? What kind of information is presented in more general terms? What "facts" are presented as "givens" or presupposed? details on need for transportation - < business/competition/markets/ charters are good for public ed

Perspective, standpoint

From what perspective, position, or standpoint is the author writing? charter school board member, advocate & business

From what perspective, position, or standpoint does the author assume the reader is understanding, or accessing the text? the same - however, also addresses social justice/ equity issues +

Tone

Is the writer general positive, neutral/balanced, or negative toward charter schools?

+

Is the writer generally positive, neutral/balanced, or negative toward traditional public schools/public education?

—

How would you describe the vocabulary and style? (Folky? Common sense? Direct? Intellectual/academic? Emotional or personal? Other?) Business-like, brisk

Social Actors

What social actors and/or voices are referenced? How are they described?

1. charter school board member
2. educators
3. elected officials – ~~neutral~~ need to make wiser decisions charters
4. principals/school leaders (+ for charter, – for public)
5. bureaucrats = "local ed'l authority"

What social actors and/or voices are excluded, or missing?

6. parents, low income
7. students, high-need
3.
4. ~~stakeholders~~ parents are mentioned but voice isn't present
5.

Notes, Insights, and Peculiarities

Other notes, insights, or peculiarities about the text?

the "low income" and "single parent" codes cover for black & color?

Digs at traditional school leaders as "weaker" & needing more "structure"

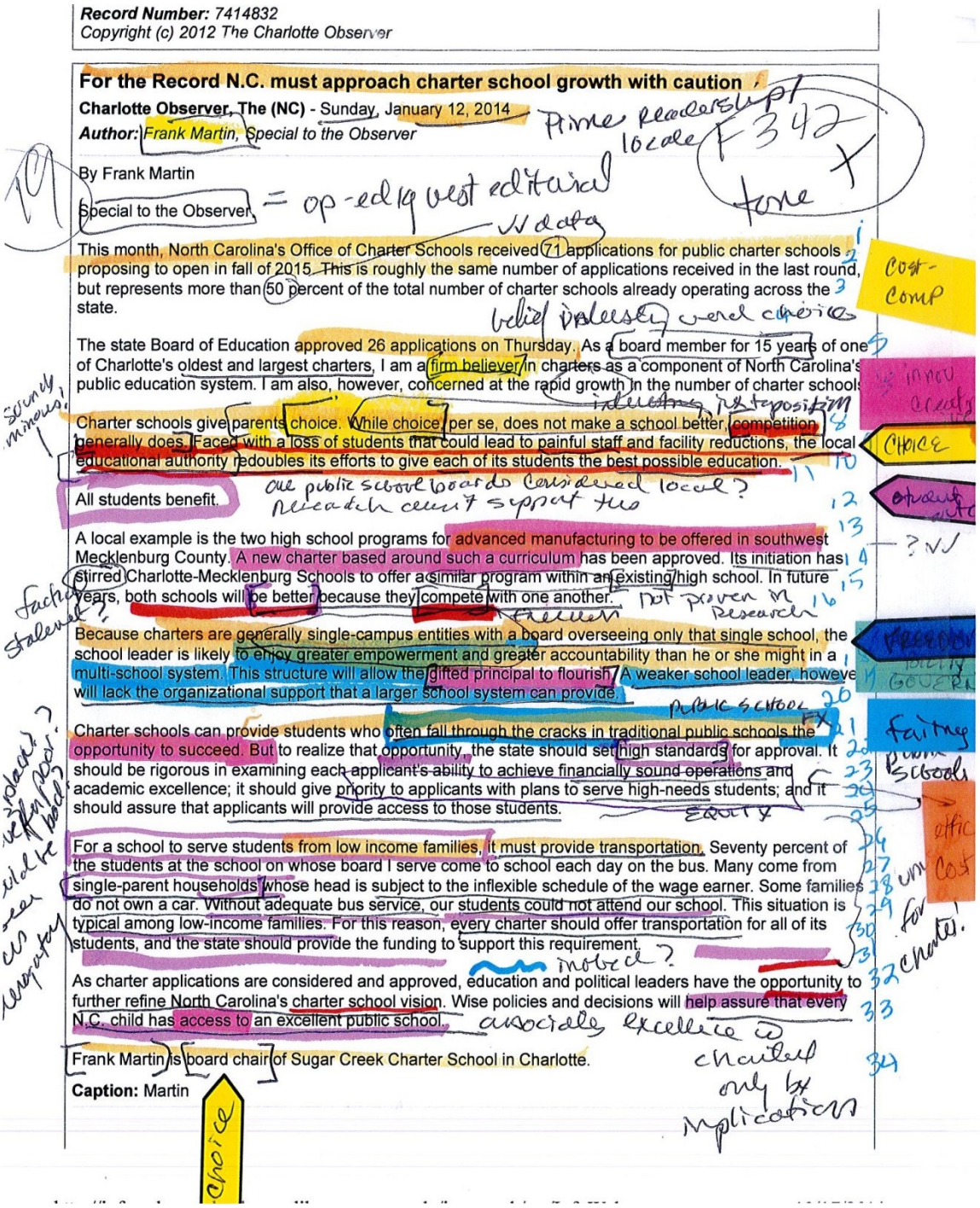
Makes good case for transportation requirement

Expressed support for charters AND concern for growth (trend to watch?)

Reflects original intent for charters = 4
ie. high-need students

APPENDIX G

SAMPLE COLOR CODING



Record Number: *7414832*
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For the Record N.C. must approach charter school growth with caution

Charlotte Observer, The (NC) - Sunday, January 12, 2014
Author: *Frank Martin, Special to the Observer*

By Frank Martin

Special to the Observer

This month, North Carolina's Office of Charter Schools received 71 applications for public charter schools proposing to open in fall of 2015. This is roughly the same number of applications received in the last round, but represents more than 50 percent of the total number of charter schools already operating across the state.

The state Board of Education approved 26 applications on Thursday. As a board member for 15 years of one of Charlotte's oldest and largest charters, I am a firm believer in charters as a component of North Carolina's public education system. I am also, however, concerned at the rapid growth in the number of charter schools.

Charter schools give parents choice. While choice per se, does not make a school better, competition generally does. Faced with a loss of students that could lead to painful staff and facility reductions, the local educational authority redoubles its efforts to give each of its students the best possible education.

All students benefit.

A local example is the two high school programs for advanced manufacturing to be offered in southwest Mecklenburg County. A new charter based around such a curriculum has been approved. Its initiation has stirred Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to offer a similar program within an existing high school. In future years, both schools will be better because they compete with one another.

Because charters are generally single-campus entities with a board overseeing only that single school, the school leader is likely to enjoy greater empowerment and greater accountability than he or she might in a multi-school system. This structure will allow the gifted principal to flourish. A weaker school leader, however will lack the organizational support that a larger school system can provide.

Charter schools can provide students who often fall through the cracks in traditional public schools the opportunity to succeed. But to realize that opportunity, the state should set high standards for approval. It should be rigorous in examining each applicant's ability to achieve financially sound operations and academic excellence; it should give priority to applicants with plans to serve high-needs students; and it should assure that applicants will provide access to those students.

For a school to serve students from low income families, it must provide transportation. Seventy percent of the students at the school on whose board I serve come to school each day on the bus. Many come from single-parent households whose head is subject to the inflexible schedule of the wage earner. Some families do not own a car. Without adequate bus service, our students could not attend our school. This situation is typical among low-income families. For this reason, every charter should offer transportation for all of its students, and the state should provide the funding to support this requirement.

As charter applications are considered and approved, education and political leaders have the opportunity to further refine North Carolina's charter school vision. Wise policies and decisions will help assure that every N.C. child has access to an excellent public school.

Frank Martin is board chair of Sugar Creek Charter School in Charlotte.

Caption: Martin

Edition: 1st State
Section: Editorial/Opinion
Page: 18A
Record Number: CLT0067696794

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Article 19

APPENDIX H

PERMISSION TO USE "AN EPISTEMIC FRAME ANALYSIS OF NEOLIBERAL CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THE US, UK, AND THE UAE" (MULLEN, SAMIER, BRINDLEY, ENGLISH, & CARR, 2013)

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Interchange
May 2013, Volume 43, Issue 3, pp 187-228
Date: 10 Mar 2013
An Epistemic Frame Analysis of Neoliberal Culture and Politics in the US, UK, and the UAE
Carol A. Mullen, Eugenie A. Samier, Sue Brindley, Fenwick W. English, Nora K. Carr

DOI: 10.1007/s10780-013-9176-0
Print ISSN: 0826-4805
Online ISSN: 1573-1790
Journal no. 10780

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